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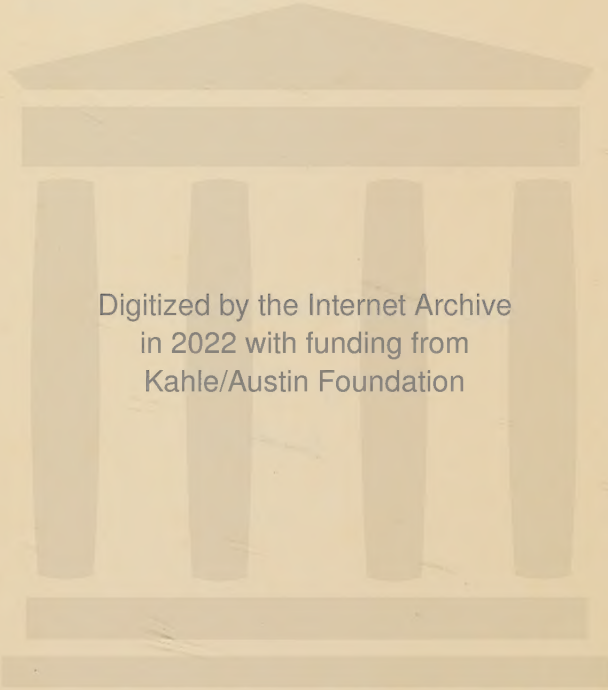
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The Keys of England

A ROMANCE OF SUSSEX

By

W. VICTOR COOK

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF SUSSEX"
"GREY FISH" ETC.



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The Keys of England

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN GARTH AYLWIN

FROM the green flats by Romney Marsh the eastward coast of Sussex throws up, exotic like a little Gibraltar, the sandstone rock whereon stands Rye.

About its feet for a thousand years the Channel tides flowed and ebbed. A little burgher town, strong, and homely, and English to the core, notwithstanding its absorption of successive waves of foreign refugees. No feudal fortress, but a hold of trading seamen, crowned by clustering ruddy roofs that climb to an apex where the ancient noble church catches the changing lights of the sea and sky. Stranded now, Rye lies by the sea her sailors ruled, and, like some old, sun-tanned mariner who has left his roving, whispers in the ear of day-dreamers of storms past and perils overcome, of voyages adventured and battles fought ages before Drake was born or Columbus sailed.

This, may it please you, is a tale of Rye in her great days, of Rye men and Rye ships, and more particularly of Captain Garth Aylwin and his ship the *Royal Richard*.

In those days, which we call the crown of the Middle Ages, the Abbey at Westminster was rebuilding; the universities were being born; the friars were breathing back into the Church the soul of religion; Louis, the holy King of France, was back from his tragic Crusade; and England was in the throes of a new birth, with Simon de Montfort and his barons laying the first foundations of freedom in blood and tears.

Captain Garth Aylwin was a Sussex man, as his name shows, for there were Aylwins in Sussex long before Domesday

Book. Though young in years, he was already a seasoned rover, and had done some deeds which gave him and his ship a wholesome standing in Rye.

For instance, when the Frenchmen, in their perennial warfare with the Cinque Ports, invented a new taunt, and came sailing in bravado up and down before Rother mouth with Englishmen and dogs hanging alternately at the yard-arm, it was Garth Aylwin who balanced the score.

"By God's wounds!" cried he profanely, "shall we stand that, we Ryers?" And though the rest of the Rye ships—as the rascally French well knew—were away at the Yarmouth fisheries, he worked his ship out of the river under oars because the wind was contrary, dodged to the windward of the pirates, and then charged down on them under full sail with the wind at his back. There were five ships in the French flotilla. One he rammed amidships as she sought to intercept him, and, sheering off, left her to sink or swim, then crammed his castles fore and aft with archers. Before he got fairly under way again two other Frenchmen grappled him on either side. The bowmen on all the ships made murderous play from their vantage heights, but it was Aylwin who had the last word, for with chunks of Rye rock neatly hurled from the fighting-top at his masthead he shore clean through the enemy bottoms, and down went dead dogs, dead English, and live Frenchmen together. By the time the *Royal Richard* had shaken clear of the mess and got her breath for the next onslaught the remaining pirates had found a better use for their yardarms, and were winging down Channel for their lives.

Again, when the Holy Father of Christendom took umbrage because the Ports lent too sympathetic an ear to de Montfort rather than to their royal master, King Henry, and his Holiness sent all the way from Rome a special envoy to put the Ryers under the Papal ban, it was Captain Garth Aylwin who got wind of it in time to sail out and meet the envoy in mid-Channel.

"Master Priest," said he, in his halting Anglo-French—for as a Sussex man Aylwin was most at home in English—"I hear you have a message for us men of Rye."

Captain Garth Aylwin

"I have, my son," answered Rome's messenger.

"Let me see it," said Garth, who had grappled the foreigner's vessel to his own, and stood on the deck of her with a score of hard-bitten Channel seamen at his back. "Let me see it quickly, reverend sir, or all the saints in Italy shall not save you from the fishes."

The priest, whose fat face was greenish with the crossing, looked dizzily over the side at the heaving seas, and, fumbling with chilled fingers in his cassock, brought out a parchment.

Captain Aylwin unrolled it. "Why, it is Latin!" cried he. "We are merchant-folk in Rye. Read it, in God's name, for we shall make nothing of it."

"I will read it when I come to land," the envoy stammered. "This water makes my stomach turn."

"You will read it now, Master Priest, or never will you come to land again."

So the envoy began to read: "Whereas ye men of Rye have shown yourselves false and faithless, and stubborn in evil-doing——"

"Hold!" cried Aylwin. "Show me where it says that!"

The priest showed him, mouthing the Latin syllables. "*Improbi atque infideles, et in malo obstinati*—so it is written, Captain."

"Then it is written a foul lie!" said Garth. "Wrongdoers we may be, for all men sin sometimes, but false and faithless never! Reverend sir, you should see our church at a Sunday Mass. You hear, shipmates—the Holy Father thinks us faithless! Some evil counsellor has poisoned his ear. Such false words, in the name of the viceroy of Our Lord, shall never be uttered in Rye, lest Christian men be led astray, and cease to pay to his Holiness the honour which is his due. To the devil with such lies, Sir Priest!"

And so saying he tore the parchment across and across, and flung the fragments into the sea.

"Go back," said he frowning, "and say that we Ryers are ignorant folk, but can steer our own course without help from clerks or cardinals. God keep his Holiness in health and wisdom!"

This exploit, being noised abroad, brought great fame

to Rye and the seamen of the Ports. More, indeed, than Captain Aylwin deemed altogether healthy for himself and his crew. For it was but a few years since the King, repairing the error of the Francophile Confessor in making over Rye to the Norman Abbey of Fécamp, had resumed the lordship of the Port for the Crown. Ready as he might be to set his nobles by the ears through his partiality for his foreign queen's relatives, the son of John had the wit to appreciate the fact that a community of French monks was no safe custodian for one of his sea-gates. Still, the priestly tradition held strong as yet in Rye, so Garth Aylwin, in some doubt which way the cat would jump after his passage with the seasick envoy, fitted out the *Royal Richard* for a freebooting expedition against the Moors, and, after squaring certain powerful Churchmen of the town with promises of a liberal dividend from the loot of the unbelievers, sailed away down Channel on his pious errand.

We see him now on the day of his homecoming, sailing into the Rother in a frosty February sunrise, with his ship laden with so great a store of plunder that the tidings went round the town like wildfire.

Garth anchored his *Royal Richard* in the river, and came ashore in his ship's boat to the quay, at the foot of the cliff whereon the Ypres Tower, square and rudely solid, kept watch from Fairlight Head to Hythe. In the group of townsmen who watched his landing was the Warden of the Tower, a scarred veteran in half-armour, and with him a ruddy-featured priest in whom Garth recognized the Prior of the Augustinian friary that stood near the eastern wall.

He doffed his cap to the Churchman, and gripped the Warden's welcoming hand.

"Your fellows keep good watch, Master Warden!"

"And need to, these days, Captain. They knew your ship an hour ago. Whence come you after all these months?"

"From going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom we might devour," laughed Garth, "begging pardon of your reverence, Prior."

"And have you devoured much, Captain?" asked the Prior slyly.

Captain Garth Aylwin

"Your Worship shall judge," said Garth. "And I think you will have no complaint of my tithe-payment. We are a rough family on my little ship, but we know what is due to Holy Church."

"My son," said the Prior with unction, "Holy Church is ever mindful of her children, and rejoiceth when they return from perilous adventure to the safety of her bosom."

So Captain Garth took comfort from the great man's reception, that his soul was safe from ecclesiastical thunderbolts. He asked for news of the town and kingdom, and the Prior looked grave.

"England is a sick realm, my son. It is now for some time open war between the Earl of Leicester and the King. God knoweth what the end will be!"

"King or Earl, they will want their dues from us all," said the sailor. Politics interested him little in these days, save in so far as the affairs of the Ports might be involved. He was a loyal Ryer, and the Brotherhood of the Ports had no more stalwart captain, but in the thirteenth century the sense of nationhood was scarcely born, and, save that its commons spoke his Saxon tongue, England itself, outside of Sussex and Kent, was almost as foreign to him as the rest of Europe.

"For whom do the Portsmen fight?" he asked, quite prepared to back his fraternity whichever way it might be.

The Prior looked wise, but gave no certain answer. "As yet they have not fought, but it is thought the King will call upon his ships."

"Ah! And inland—how fares it, Prior? Is Sussex for King or Earl?"

"Some for the one, some for the other, as through all the land, my son. The time is very evil, and the country filled with strife."

"Are any great ones dead since I sailed away?" the seaman asked.

"Why," the Warden answered in his turn, "none to speak of. Unless it be Peter of Udimore."

"What! The Wizard of the Woods! Strange things were said of that lord. I have heard that the Franciscan

warlock, whom some call the Admirable Doctor, and others damn for the prince of black magicians, is bosom friend to Lord Peter, and that the woods of Udimore, could they speak, would tell secrets at which men's cheeks would pale."

"Captain," said the Prior, "these are matters for Holy Church. That Lord Peter was visited by Roger Bacon is well known. That he lived aloof is true, and true also that there were those who called him sorcerer. Yet he died a faithful son of the Church, leaving his daughter, the Lady Adela, in ward to the Abbey of Robertsbridge."

Garth Aylwin laughed. "A rich prize for my lord Abbot! He will be in no haste to have her wed. I once thought to ride to Udimore to see that lady for myself. It is said she is a very witch of loveliness, and hath as many lovers as the trees in her woods."

"To such light talk I give no credence, my son," said the priest severely.

"Moreover," put in the Warden, "Lord Peter, in committing her to Robertsbridge, made this express provision, that till she came of age she should not enjoy her inheritance, and then only if she were wed to one of noble rank, whom she herself should choose of her own free will, without any compulsion from her wardship. Would such discretion be left to a wanton?"

"Why, it seems to me," said Garth with a grin, "that Lord Peter feared she would cast herself and his lands away to some wastrel adventurer, yet mistrusted my lord Abbot even more than his daughter. God rest his soul, and prosper the maid's love-making, say I, if she be as fair as they report! I heard she could have Lewes Castle and the Earl Warenne's son to boot if so she chose. But all that is as it may be. Tell me of Rye. How fares the old town?"

"As for the town," said the Prior, "you come home on a notable day. The Bailiff is dead with his year of office half done, and at noon we choose his successor beside the cross in the churchyard according to ancient custom."

"And who will be the new man?"

"Roger Farr the jurat," answered the Warden "A

man of substance and a man of brains, such as these times call for."

"Ah!" The sailor's face was too deeply tanned to show any change of colour, but the Warden looked up quizzically at his tall figure.

"To be Bailiff of Rye is a great thing," he said, with ponderous gravity. "It is to be chief of the barons and freemen of the Port, with none above him save our lord the King and his High Constable at Dover. A Bailiff of Rye must be nice in the choice of his friends, and his daughter, when he hath one——"

"Tell me, Warden—is she well?" The rover's voice was almost humble.

"Well, and well sought after, Captain," said the officer, relaxing his portentous tone. "A gracious maid, with wit and beauty, who rules her father's house like any princess. It is a pity she has no mother to guide her. But doubtless she will soon be wed."

"Ha! And to whom?" cried Garth, catching his breath.

"Now, by the Mass, Captain, how should I know? I know only, for it is common knowledge, that many desire her. Doubtless her father will choose her some worthy baron of the Port, who has brought riches and honour to the town. Such a man, for example, as yourself."

"Why, I hope so, gossip," said Aylwin frankly. "I am not yet baron or freeman, but I have mighty arguments in my ship's hold yonder, which you shall judge of when we meet again. God keep your Worships. I have been long away, and the smell of Rye is heady!"

Up went Captain Garth from the quayside by the stairway in the face of the cliff, and, passing through the wall by the little portal called Badding's Gate, came to the familiar grass-grown, stone-flagged streets, and strode on his way. He was a long, lissome man, with the ruddy-gold hair and glinting blue eyes of a pure Saxon ancestry, a man who, though fallen to low estate, cherished the tradition that his grandsire's grandsire had stood among Harold's house-carles by the golden standard of Wessex on the hill of Battle. He went clean-shaven, as the fashion then was,

having carefully removed his sea-growth of beard before coming ashore. A mouth very ready to smile tempered the expression of a face which hardship and rough living had otherwise left too dour. Garth had discarded, with his mariner's beard, his rough seafaring clothes, and wore the time-honoured service dress of a captain in the Navy of the Ports : a tunic of white wool, with a red cross surmounting a half lion and a half ship. A little close-fitting cap was on his head, and his white tunic contrasted oddly with the extreme sunburn on his face and neck and on his long, rough seaman's hands.

The Warden's words set him frowning, as with elastic step he strode into the town. So the suitors were after Rosamund! His memory went back half a year, to the summer evening when he had sailed on his adventure. He had known that the wily old jurat misdoubted him for a wild and lawless fellow, and he had been put off with "ifs" and "whens" when he asked Farr boldly for his daughter. But the girl herself had kept his heart warm with a promise.

Yet she was dutiful, he knew. And the suitors were after her! Garth damned them as he strode along.

Well, he had fulfilled the jurat's "ifs" and "whens," and the *Royal Richard* contained that which even a Bailiff of Rye must view respectfully. Garth, swinging down Watchbell Street in the frosty sunshine toward the farther end, where Farr's house looked out across the estuary, thought lovingly of a precious token he had brought for Rosamund. It was a pearl necklace, and worth a noble's ransom. He had taken it himself, in the flames of a burning palace, to put round the neck of his love. Let the suitors, curse them, produce such another! Captain Aylwin quickened his pace.

But he was not allowed to reach the jurat's house without interruptions. Even while he talked on the quay the fame of his triumphant return had flown abroad. First one and then another stopped him to wring his hand, to smite his broad shoulder approvingly, to besiege him with questionings. "Is it true, Captain, that you have captured the Soldan of the Saracens, and brought him home in a

Captain Garth Aylwin

cage?" "Garth, our Holy Father, the Pope, when he heareth this, will have you build a cathedral for a penance." "Captain, our lord the King will make you Admiral of the Ports."

"I would sooner the Bailiff of Rye would make me his freeman," said Garth, putting aside the friendly, detaining hands. "Make way, my hearties. I go to give his Worship my respects. God helps him who helps himself!"

A townsman laughed as he was brushed aside. "Then God should help you mightily, Captain. They say you have brought home the plunder of half Barbary."

Aylwin looked back, grinning over his shoulder. "We took what we could get," said he. "But we left a few good Ryers behind whom I could ill spare."

"The more share for those that are left," answered the other. Then one ran forward and took the seaman by the arm. "Hold, Captain! Here cometh the new Bailiff that is to be, and all the jurats with him. I warrant they have been washing their faces at his house around a wine-cask." Leaving Garth, he ran forward, waving his cap jubilantly. "Master Farr, worshipful jurats, here is Captain Aylwin, who threw the Pope's ban into the sea, returned from heathen lands with his ship bursting with gold and diamonds!"

A dozen men in scarlet robes had come forth from a gateway in a turreted wall that was half enclosure, half fortification, and had turned in the direction of the church. Solid, comfortable men of affairs, each with his baron's sword hanging in its belt beneath his jurat's robes, for, burghers though they were, their town was a full barony, knowing no lord but the King, and each freeman of Rye held the title of baron in his own right.

The scarlet group stopped at the townsman's hail, and one among them stepped briskly out and advanced to Aylwin with outstretched hand. His shrewd, broad face, fringed under his little dark cap with grey hair that hung down and then curled up away from his ample shoulders, was a little flushed, and his small dark eyes shone with obvious excitement, but he bore himself with the dignity of a man well used to consideration.

"Welcome home, Captain," said he cordially. "Your ship was reported, and the news of your coming is on every tongue. The jurats had it already a half-hour since, when they came to bring me to the council."

His voice had a faint note of pride, well restrained. A man, even a man of consideration, was not chosen Bailiff of Rye every day.

"I thank your Worship," said Garth, doffing his cap. "They tell me you are to rule us."

"So they tell me, Aylwin." Then, in a low tone, so that only the sailor might hear, "Is it true what they say—that you have a rich cargo in the river?"

The sailor nodded curtly. "I have kept my word, sir. There is that in my ship would well-nigh purchase Rye were our lord King Henry minded to sell. Your Worship will not have forgotten, I trust——"

"Tut, man! We'll talk later," the jurat interrupted hastily, with a little frown of caution. Then, raising his tone, "Come with us to the council, Master Aylwin, and let us have your adventure at first-hand."

The jurats closed round the Captain in an eager, curious group, and the townsfolk fell back to give them passage.

Aylwin shot one searching look at the grey walls they were leaving ere he turned, with tightening lips, to accompany his escort toward the church.

CHAPTER II

THE KING'S MESSENGER

RYE sparkled cheerfully under the frosty noon. A crowd of many hundred people, brightly clothed, voluble, expectant, surged to and fro on the cobbles of the wide church square. Men and women wore their holiday best, the gracious garb of an age when folk dressed like pictures, each picture telling its subject in terms of silk or cloth or leather. The centre of the crowd was a group about a rough timber platform beside the cross in the churchyard, where a few weapons flashed in the sunlight on that steep crest from which the church, massive and gabled and buttressed, looked far out over the encircling rivers to the great flats of Romney Marsh, and the wind-blown Channel, and the curve of the Kent and Sussex shores.

While the assembly waited, chatting and laughing, turning their eyes every few minutes to the empty platform, a sudden clatter of hoofs made those at the back look round, down the High Street eastward, where it swung round within the circuit of the walls to the great Landgate, out of sight.

A cluster of horsemen approached, the iron-shod hoofs slipping and sparkling on the cobbled roadway.

The leader, in banded mail with a white surcoat, halted his half-dozen riders on the outskirts of the crowd, and pressed forward with a single squire. A three-cornered cap of black velvet was on his head, and his squire carried his great round helmet and his lance. His clean-shaven, haughty face was framed in dark curling hair that reached just below his ears, and a thick fringe of the same across his forehead, combined with his frowning brows, gave him a sternness of aspect beyond his years. Yet he had comeliness of a harsh, aquiline sort, and sat his horse as if the

animal were part of him. When he reined in he spoke mildly enough.

"Men of Rye, I have a message for your Bailiff. Tell me where he is to be found."

A fellow in a grey tunic and a close yellow cap, whose long crook and brown face proclaimed him a shepherd from the Marsh, looked up at the horseman with a grin.

"Worshipful knight, we are just about to find him," he said. "And if you will give yourself the pains to wait here a couple of Paternosters you shall be among the first to discover him."

"Is he lost, then, this Bailiff of yours?"

"Not so much lost as lacking, noble and valiant sir. We have his body, but we no longer have his soul."

"What! The man is dead?"

"Dead and buried," answered the shepherd, leaning on his staff. "But wait a little, valiant knight, and all will be well."

The stolid Saxon faces stared up at the horseman with slowly broadening grins. The Ryers as a body had no great love for feudal lords.

The knight's brows came together over his dark eyes. "The fiend take your Bailiff and you!" he cried. "I bring a message from the King's Highness for this town of yours, which you will neglect at your peril. Where is he who fills the Bailiff's place?"

For a moment none answered. Some of the men turned hesitating glances toward a young woman who stood near them in the crowd. She approached the knight, smiling a little, colouring a little, but very self-possessed. His frown relaxed at sight of her gracious figure beside his powerful horse. She was a tall, grey-eyed maid, dressed in a long blue cotte brocaded with gold and silver threads and partly covered by a fur-lined cloak of deeper blue. At the sides of her round white cap and wimple of fine linen her black hair showed becomingly. She looked up coolly at the haughty young noble.

"Sir," said she in a rich and musical voice, and speaking with easy fluency in the Norman-French, "it is evident

The King's Messenger

you are a stranger to our town of Rye, or you would know that our barons and freemen of the Port are met here, according to ancient custom, to choose a successor to our Bailiff, who is dead. In a few minutes you will see him chosen, and I doubt not he will give your message the attention it deserves. Look—they are about to announce him!”

She pointed with a delicately gloved hand to the platform, on which at this moment several figures appeared above the glinting weapons round the cross.

The frown cleared as if by magic from the rider's face, and his dark eyes, looking down at her, lit with bold admiration. He flung from his horse and stood beside her.

“Thanks, pretty one! It is true I am strange to your customs of Rye, yet not altogether strange to your town. My name—the name of your servant—is William de Warenne.”

“Sir William de Warenne!” The girl drew back a step before those bold eyes, for the name of John of Warenne, of Lewes Castle, the great baron whose ancestor was the Conqueror, was the mightiest in Sussex. “You are the Earl's son?”

“Aye, sweetheart, and thankful am I to the King for sending me to his town of Rye to meet such courtesy and beauty.”

The grey eyes under their finely pencilled brows met his with a coolness that was a little provoking, though the girl's cheeks flushed at the ardent flattery of his words and gaze. To cross glances with a Warenne might be dangerous sport for a woman in those days. At the bare name the Ryers round about them discreetly edged away, all but the shepherd with his crook, who stood calmly watching the stranger.

Suddenly a trumpet sounded from the platform, and the Prior of the Augustinians stood forward, a parchment in his hand.

“Jurats and barons and freemen of Rye,” cried the prior in a loud voice, “it is noon by the dial. Choose now from among you a man to be chief of the barons of Rye, to do justice to all men, and to bear true allegiance to our lord

the King. Men of Rye, the times are evil. The realm of England is torn with deadly broils. Our lord the King and his barons are at variance, but with these high matters we have no concern. The bailiff whom you choose must be such a man as will fearlessly uphold the ancient charters, the rights and privileges of your Port against all who would curtail or defy them. Your trade must go freely overseas, your ships and your mariners must be masters in their own house—aye, and take precedence in Yarmouth and the eastern ports.” (Here came a shout of approval from the crowd.) “He must defend us from the French who rove the Channel. He must powerfully resist all manner of men, whether at home or abroad, who would interfere with our liberties. He must increase our wealth and ensure our safety. In his hands the keys of England, which we of the Ports hold, must be held fast.”

A roar of acclamation went up from the crowd.

“Jurats and barons and freemen of Rye,” cried the speaker again, rolling his words with satisfaction on his priestly tongue, “there is one of you who has long striven to do these things. I give to you the name of Roger Farr. Roger Farr, stand forth!”

The grey-haired Bailiff-elect stepped forward beside the Prior, broad-shouldered and robust in his scarlet jurat’s robe, and holding in one hand his little dark cap of black velvet. Shouts of approval greeted his appearance, mixed with a few voices of dissent from supporters of rival candidates for the coveted honour. The Prior hastened to drown the feeble seeds of discord.

“Here stands Roger Farr!” cried he. “His ships sail the sea. His foresters bring wealth to our Port from Playden and all the northern woods. His wool stands heaped upon our quays. He feareth neither lord nor pirate. He holdeth fast by the rights of Rye. Who votes for Roger Farr?”

A multitude of hands went up amid a vast shouting. Roger Farr stood still beside his introducer, seemingly as stolid and unimpressed as though the thronging people were a flock of his own sheep.

The Prior raised his hand for silence, and when some-

The King's Messenger

thing like it ensued he announced: "Roger Farr, by virtue of the power in me vested by our high lord, the King's Constable at Dover, and by the voices of these present jurors, barons, and freemen of Rye, I proclaim you Bailiff of the King's town and Port of Rye. And I order you to serve and discharge the said office, which if you do not consent to do I authorize these honest men, in accordance with ancient custom, forthwith to proceed to your house and beat it down, for an example and a warning. Do you serve or do you not serve?"

"I serve, Prior," answered Roger Farr, stiffly nodding his grey head.

"Then swear now to execute the King's justice on all men; to provide the due proportion of ships for the Navy of the Ports for the safeguarding of the realm of England; and in particular to maintain and uphold all the ancient rights and privileges of this Port, that the barons and freemen of the same shall ever be quit on both sides of the sea throughout our whole land of tallage, passage, carriage, rivage, spondage, wreck, resetting, and all customs, and be answerable to none save only the King's Constable at Dover. Do you swear?"

"All this I swear," said Roger Farr impassively.

"That is a strange oath of service," said William de Warenne to the girl beside him. "It containeth no mention of allegiance to our lord the King!"

"Our barons of Rye, valiant sir, swear fealty to the Constable of the Ports. The Constable swears to the King."

"Nevertheless, sweet mistress, at such a time as this—your Bailiff is a true King's man, is he not?"

"As to that you would do well to inquire of himself," she answered.

"Trust me, I will!" said the young knight. "And Master Farr will do well to answer me seemingly. We can have no traitors in the gates of the sea."

The girl faced him with glowing cheek. "Lord William de Warenne, if you will be counselled by a woman, you will remember, in speaking with our Bailiff, that we Ryers are little used to threats!"

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The great baron's son laughed. "From such lips as yours, pretty one, I will take anything they condescend to give. But when I deliver the King's message to the Bailiff of Rye I will speak as one servant of the King to another. And woe to that other if, hearing, he fails in obedience! What is to do now? Is not this bailiff-making finished?"

The shouts which had greeted the Bailiff's acceptance of office had died down, and Roger Farr had come to the very edge of the platform. He held up his hand for silence.

"The new Bailiff will choose his new freeman," explained the lady hurriedly. "It is his privilege. Listen—ah, listen!"

Unceremoniously she turned her back upon the knight. Her obvious excitement, the shining of her grey eyes as she spoke, the eagerness with which her hitherto indifferent face was turned to catch every word, were not lost upon the admiring knight.

"Jurats and barons and freemen of Rye," cried Farr in a strong, masterful voice, "I appoint this day, as is my right, a new baron to the Brotherhood of the Ports. One who hath deserved well of our town and manfully upheld our rights. He has fought and sunk the Yarmouth ships that would despoil us of our trade. He has made his own ship a terror to our enemies. Why need I describe his deeds, which are known to you all? Moreover, he has this day returned among us from paynim lands, his ship laden with spoil of the Saracens. I proclaim Captain Garth Aylwin now and henceforth baron and freeman of Rye!"

A clamour of approval, more boisterous and unanimous even than that which had marked the choice of the Bailiff himself, answered this announcement. Caps flew in the air. A group of seafarers, tanned by sun and salt wind almost to the colour of mahogany, and garbed in a strange medley of English and Eastern dress, pushed forward and seemed about to storm the wooden platform in honour of their captain, but halted at the foot, giving tongue to their exultation with frantic shouts for "Baron Garth," till Aylwin was shoved forward by the jurats and stood

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beside the Bailiff, doffing his cap from his red-gold hair, and smiling grimly down at his cheering shipmates.

William de Warenne edged up and watched the girl beside him, and saw her eyes beaming, her cheeks aflame, her red lips parted in a proud smile, while under the rich stuff of her dress her bosom rose and fell. A spasm of jealousy pricked him.

Aylwin was repeating after the Bailiff the words of the Rye freeman's oath.

"Who is this roystering Saxon, pretty one?" asked the knight.

She turned her flushed face. "Did you not hear him named? It is Captain Garth Aylwin, the boldest sailor of Rye. Look, they are carrying him down!"

In fact Aylwin, his oath taken, was snatched bodily from the platform by his men, and while the crowd laughed and cheered they bore him shoulder-high along the pathway from the church. The assembly began to break up.

"My lord," said the girl, "if you have business with the Bailiff I will take you now to his house. Clear a way, Ralph."

The brown-faced shepherd, who had kept near her, opened a path with his crook through the crowd, who gave way readily enough.

The knight called his squire and escort to follow, and with the rein of his great horse over his arm walked on with his handsome guide. "May I seat you on my horse through the press?" said he.

"I thank your Worship," she said composedly, "but your horse, I think, is as unused to such a rider as I to such a horse. The noble beast! I warrant he is happier on the floor of the lists than on these cobbles of ours!" From the splendid charger the lady's eyes, subtly flattering, travelled a moment to his rider. An earl's son—and the son of such an earl—was a new thing to her at close quarters, and if her smile flashed dangerously in response to his eager look it was an excusable encouragement to homage.

Curious glances of townsfolk followed them as they walked, she a step in advance and superbly oblivious of the crowd, and he greedily observing her.

At the western end of the street, on the slope of the hill just within the town walls, they came to the turreted wall and the gateway where Garth had met the jurats. The gate was closed by a great oaken door, on which Ralph the shepherd struck with his crook. An old serving-man opened, and on seeing the lady held the door wide.

"Will it please you enter, Sir William?" said she. "We have not stabling for all your horses, but if you will halt your men without, refreshment shall be found for man and beast. My father will be here shortly. It is he whom they have made Bailiff."

The old janitor doffed his cap humbly at sight of the proud young noble, and stepped forward to take his horse. "Whom else but Master Farr could they choose, mistress?" he muttered. "In these days we need a man to rule over us in Rye."

"Tell him when he comes," the girl ordered, "that the noble knight Sir William de Warenne awaits him with urgent matters. See to it that the riders are fitly entertained. My lord, will you honour our poor house?"

She passed with a regal air through the enclosure within the wall, a wide space half courtyard, half garden, well planted with trees, but bare at this season, and led the way to the house.

"You must forgive me," said the knight, with more respect than he had hitherto given her. "If I had known you for the Bailiff's own daughter——"

"Why?" She flashed a smile. "What then, my lord?"

"Why, by the bones of St Cuthman, fairest one, I would have spoken with the greater humility, since your Bailiffs of Rye are barons in their own right."

"We Ryers are barons and freemen all," she answered, with easy tolerance. "We call none master save our lord the King and his Constable at Dover. Yet we are barons without castles save our ships, and lords without vassals save ourselves. If an enemy annoys us, we fight him, but we are not learned in the niceties of chivalry. Saxon boors you would class us, my lord, with the rest. So why should

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Rosamund Farr be honoured above her condition by your courtesy?"

Her cool, mocking glance met the young man's admiring gaze, pricking him to keener zest.

"A man is honoured for his condition; a woman for her beauty," said he boldly. "And so your name is Rosamund?"

"Does it not please you, sir?"

"By the splendour of God!" swore William, with the mighty Conqueror's oath, "it is a name of which you are worthy, though it is one that few women can bear, since it challenges comparison with that peerless beauty who first made it famous and bewitched the wisdom of a great king."

"Sir," said she smoothly, "my father the Bailiff would feel great content to hear such expressions from noble lips."

"Fair flower of loveliness, I will repeat them to him, and with additions." His dark eyes took fire as they encountered hers again. "Never met I woman more beautiful!" he vowed.

"Nor I, Sir William, a knight more swift in passing judgment. If it please you to lay aside your harness here in the hall, I will send you some refreshment while you wait."

She had brought him to a great room, of which the floor was strewn with clean rushes and warm skins, and the high gabled roof upheld by stout timber beams. A huge fire burned in an open chimney at one end, and the walls were hung with tapestry. The windows looked far out over the town walls to the glittering expanse of the Channel and along the coast toward the distant cliffs of Hastings. She was for leaving him, and had reached the door when he turned and strode to her. "Fair Mistress Rosamund, will you not light me with your presence while the Bailiff tarries? It is a hard life we poor knights lead in a land racked with war. A man knows not if he will live to see to-morrow. Between the King and this cursed Earl of Leicester England is torn in pieces, yet here in your town of Rye it seems men go about their affairs, caring neither for the one party nor the other. Will you not sit and talk?" The knight's voice was pleading, but the haughty dark features held a hint of smouldering fire.

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"Noble and valiant sir," said Rosamund, "my tather would not readily forgive me if I so far failed in my duties. This poor house, while you honour it, is yours. Pray you eat and drink, and when my father comes be sure I will bring him to you."

She swept him a curtsy, and, clapping her hands, summoned servants to attend him, and departed. Coming again to the gateway in the wall, where the squire and men-at-arms, besmirched with mud like men who had ridden far, were dismounted, she satisfied herself that they were suitably provided for, and walked forth again into the street. The afternoon sun shone gaily, and she walked with a proud, careless grace, as one fully conscious, even in that free and privileged town, of consideration and precedence.

She had not gone far when she met the new Bailiff and his new freeman approaching. They stopped, and the older man regarded his daughter with a satisfied smile.

"Well, Rose, I am Bailiff! And Garth Aylwin, whom you used to know, is freeman. Do you remember Captain Aylwin?"

Rosamund flushed to the brows, and curtsied. "I have not forgotten Captain Aylwin. It is more likely that in the midst of great adventures Captain Aylwin has forgotten me."

"Forgotten!" cried Garth. "Now, by all the saints in Paradise——"

The Bailiff, permitting his new dignity a tolerant smile, raised a large, knotted hand. "Disturb no saints with your protestations, Garth. Rose, I will certify his remembrance. He is the same as ever—a dare-devil pirate, if ever one sailed from the Rother. I wager you do not guess his latest exploit!"

"Why, sir, to win the freedom of Rye!"

"A good guess, girl, yet behind the times. This impetuous rascal comes sailing into the river this very morning, with his body scarce healed of the scars he took from the Saracens, and his ship laden with heathen spoil; he meets me by the way as I go up to the church for the Bailiff-choosing; for the sake of his father's memory and his own deeds I name him freeman, and invite him home with me to eat

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some Christian food. And on the way, what think you he has done? Guess again."

Rosamund, looking from her father to his companion, caught Garth watching her with a gaze that brought the colour rushing back to her cheeks.

"I am at the end of my guessing, sir," said she.

"Then, Garth, I must tell her. The fellow says to me: 'Master Farr,' says he, 'my matters have prospered. I am a rich man. My ship has brought home a fortune.' I forgot to say that besides spoiling the heathen ashore the man encountered a rich Moorish galley off the Spanish coast, and took her with all her treasure. 'And with your good pleasure,' says he, 'I would fain wed your daughter Rosamund.' Now what think you of that?"

With a flaming face and shining eyes Rosamund caught again the gaze of the young sea-captain, then turned to her father.

"In this, as in all things, sir, I shall dutifully fulfil your commands."

"You hear, Master Aylwin? A good girl! A loyal daughter! My dear, I will consider what those commands shall be. In such a matter I will not be hurried—no, not even for the son of my old friend. Nevertheless, he has given me a handsome bribe—look!"

He drew from his belt a dagger of Eastern make, the sheath beautifully inlaid with gold and the hilt glittering with gems.

"He took that from the Dey himself on his own poop ere he slew him. Or so the rascal says. And on the *Royal Richard* he hides a little keepsake for you, my child."

"If you will wear it, Rosamund," said Garth humbly. "It is a collar of pearls."

"Fine pearls, Rose. Worth a noble's ransom, he tells me. The Earl Warrenne hath no such necklace for his Countess at Lewes. What say you to that?"

"I will be guided by your commands, sir. As to Earl John Warrenne, his son awaits you in the hall with a message from the King's Majesty."

The new Bailiff's air of satisfied complacency dropped from him like a shed garment at that news. "Now God defend

us!" he exclaimed, drawing back a pace. "Why should John Warenne send his wolf-cub to Rye? What is the message, girl?"

"Father, the young knight did not say; only that it was urgent."

Farr had become suddenly sombre. "What have I to do with the Earl Warenne? Rose, art sure it is Sir William?"

"The Warenne arms are on his shield and on the surcoats of his men. They have ridden hard. They came by the Landgate while you were at the church. I have ordered them refreshment."

Roger Farr frowned thoughtfully. "This Sir William by all account is a bold young blade," said he. "We of the Five Ports want no other barons lording it in Rye. How many are with him?"

"His squire and half a dozen more."

The Bailiff nodded. "Enough for protection, but not enough to cause trouble. I will see him. Child, you were better out of sight while these gentry are about. Knights' lances and knights' glances are two bad things in an honest merchant's home."

"Sir," said Garth, as the Bailiff hesitated, "with your permission I will take Mistress Rosamund to see the toy I have brought her, and such other poor matters as my ship contains. My fellows will take pleasure in telling of our adventures and showing her how we pass our time on the seas. In an hour, if it suits your pleasure and hers, I will bring her back to your house."

"Thanks, Captain. Rose, will you go see the *Royal Richard*?"

"Gladly, father."

"In an hour, then," said the Bailiff. "Do not be longer. I will get this knight's message, which I much mistrust, and then I will see him and his fellows on their road."

He went on toward his house, and Aylwin and the girl turned back for the town walls and the timber quays below them. He took her hand to help her on the rough descent.

"Rosamund," said he, "for six months I have been thinking of to-day!"

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"The day you would win the freedom of Rye?" Their eyes met, and hers were lit with mischief.

"The day when I should go to Roger Farr and ask him for his daughter."

"Ah! Then you are a prophet, Captain Aylwin!"

"A prophet foretells the future. A lover only hopes for it, sweetheart."

"Am I your sweetheart?" she asked him lightly. "Sailors have many loves, they tell me. In six months, with adventures in many strange lands, you must have looked into many lovely eyes, Captain."

"Indeed, that is true, Rose of the World," said he.

"Why do you call me Rose of the World?"

"Because that is your name. I asked a learned clerk. *Rosa mundi*, he said it was—Latin."

"Is it?" said she. "I am very ignorant. I did not know."

"The Rose of the World. Many flowers, but only one Rose," said Aylwin.

"You have learned flattery in your travels, Captain Garth. But of course there are many roses. Some dark, some fair. A traveller like you knows that very well. Roses bloom rarely in the gardens of the East, I warrant." She tossed her head. And when they came through the little Baddings Gate and down on to the wharf she shaded her eyes against the sun. "Is that your *Royal Richard*, Garth?"

"Aye, that is she."

Out in the stream the vessel was lying to a buoy—a little ship with a single mast, on which the big sail was furled; open amidships, where were the rowers' benches and a raised gangway for the boatswain running down the centre. Bow and stern were built up high into miniature castles, on the uppermost deck of which the archers might stand, and beneath their walls the cabin space was packed. The ship's sides were bleached with sun and weather, and cried aloud for the paint-pot. From beneath the lantern on her mast hung a large tattered pennon, showing in faded colours the device of a great red heart placed within the outline of a lion rampant and surmounted by a crown.

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"A little ship to fare so far!" The girl looked on the tiny vessel with a certain pride. "You must have wondered often if ever you would see Rye Town again. How far is it, Captain Aylwin, to the lands of the Saracens?"

The sailor shrugged his broad shoulders. "It is far enough. Far enough and perilous enough, with tempests and savage shores and bloody pirates to keep us waking, without counting the unbelievers at the journey's end. God hath been kind to me and mine, bringing us back with full hands when many better men have left their bones bleaching. Come aboard and see our sea-dogs' kennel, sweetheart."

He loosed the little boat that was tied to the quayside, and, helping her in, pulled out to the ship. "She is foul with travel. You must not pry too closely," he warned. "To-morrow we will beach her, and a month hence she will be as fresh as when she sailed. Ah, Rosamund, I was a poor man then, and lived on hope, and wooed you with promises. If you knew how I have feared to find you wedded to some rich freeman of the Port!"

"I promised to wait for your return."

"True, dear, and by the light of that promise I steered. Yet your father would promise nothing, and there were many suitors. See, here is the keep of our sea-castle!" He led her into the principal cabin, outside which two armed men stood guard. It was an ill-lighted place, stuffy, and packed like a storehouse with a miscellaneous assortment of ship's gear, weapons of the East and of the West, piles of silk and damask, rich stuffs tied down under tarpaulin, and clamped chests fast locked. They had to stoop low to avoid striking their heads against the ship's timbers above them.

Taking out a key, Aylwin opened one of the chests, and took from it a strong metal box, opening this in turn with a smaller key. Even in the dim light of the cabin a glitter of jewels came from the box. The young captain drew out a noble collar of pearls and turquoises, cunningly set in thin oblong plates of wrought gold, held together with clasps of filigree silver. He laid it in the girl's hand.

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"Will you wear it, Rosamund?"

She held up the splendid thing to the dim light, and looked back to him, rosy with pleasure and surprise.

"Oh!" she almost whispered. "It is a treasure for a king's daughter!"

"Or a bailiff's," he laughed. "Put it on, Rose of the World. Or, better still, let me."

Clasping it round her neck, he suddenly felt her soft arms about him, and their lips were together.

"Take it off again, Garth," she whispered at length. "My dear, it would buy half Rye!"

"If it buy the Bailiff's 'Yes,' my beautiful, it will have served its turn. Rosamund, if I had come home empty-handed!"

"My heart would still have been yours, my Captain Garth."

"But not your dear hand. Your father is ambitious."

"That is true." She sighed and smiled. "But then you have not come empty-handed. Take it off, and let us return."

"Let us return with all my heart, but that coil shall stay about your white neck until I put a ring round your finger, Rose. So ere we start let me hear those lips say one sweet word."

"What word?"

"Let them say: 'I take you for my lover.'"

"But that is six sweet words."

"Say them, Rose!"

"Well, then, if I must—I take you for my lover, Garth, and I love you dearly!"

He took her in his arms again, and she clung to him, while he rained kisses on her fair face and on her eyes and lips and hair.

"And I will serve you, sweetheart, with steadfast loyalty," he vowed, "and no queen of beauty before whom proud knights kneel shall go more splendidly arrayed than you. You make summer in winter-time, Rose. Oh, the world stands still for me till we two are wed!"

Rosamund laughed happily, gazing down on him as he

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knelt. "You sailors are headlong wooers," said she. "To think that yesterday you were on the sea, that an hour ago you scarce had seen me, and behold you now! But my father is a cool man, and I think the world will not stand still because we love."

And so indeed it proved. For when they came back to the house they met the Earl's son and his riders leaving, and the young noble sprang to the ground, signing his men to ride on. Low he bent before Rosamund, and his dark eyes shone.

"Kind hostess, and lovely star of the sea," said he in his courtly Norman-French, "I have delivered my message to your worshipful father, and must be gone again on the King's business, which will not wait for a poor knight. Of your charity wish me honour in battle till the light of your eyes shall lead me back to Rye!"

"Do you, then, return to Rye, my lord? You are a stranger here."

"Stranger no longer, since my heart outstays me," he answered with an ardent glance that brought the blood to her face.

Captain Aylwin stepped forward, suddenly grim as a thunder-cloud. "Sir," says he, "our maids of Rye are unused to knightly jests. Therefore, since you ride on the King's business, you were best a-going."

The young baron gave the sailor a haughty start of surprise. Then fire leaped into the dark eyes. "Have a care, my cockerel seabird, lest I slit your comb! Stand aside, while the lady speaks her pleasure."

"By the Rood!" growled Garth, curbing his wrath, "if you get not on your business quickly, be it the King's or the devil's, you may find it interrupted."

De Warenne laughed contemptuously. "Ho, there!" he shouted, and, as his escort wheeled: "Come hither, fellows, and throw me this noisy chicken into the river. We will see if he swims as heartily as he swears."

The seaman sprang forward, but Rosamund, as quick as he, hung on his arm.

"Garth, are you mad?" cried she. "And you, my lord

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of Warenne, in God's name be warned! Here in my father's house are men enough to strew the street with your bodies at a call. And Captain Aylwin here wears the coat of the Navy of the Ports. A baron and freeman of Rye he is, who has fought in more battles by land and sea than even you have ever heard of. As for me, since you ask it, I wish you well in battle and in bower. But call off your men, for I think it would little please our lord the King to lose a good knight in so foolish a brawl."

De Warenne, who had hastily drawn his sword, thrust it back with a gesture of careless pride, and motioned his returning escort away.

"To lips so sweet a knight must give obedience," he declared. "Yet when I come again, mistress, it will be well to have that crowing gull safe caged. Else I will have him to Lewes, to be taught manners to his masters. Up, men, and away!"

They clattered along the street with a flashing of sparks from the iron hoofs, and Aylwin, his tanned face flushed with wrath, turned a curious look on his companion. She stood like an offended princess, erect and stately, the fair oval of her face a little pale, but with two bright spots of red glowing in her cheeks. Her grey eyes flashed, and the gloved fingers of her left hand played nervously with his chain of pearls at her neck.

"That was bravely spoken, Rosamund. Whether it were well spoken, who knows! You have kept the peace for your father, and baulked two angry men, which is no light thing for a maid. But I think you may have saved the King his knight to bring a worse trouble in the future. That steel-cased villain has some scheme behind his black brows. 'When I come again,' says he. When he comes again let him beware! We gulls of the sea, as he calls us, have sharp beaks and claws."

The flash went out of the grey eyes, and she smiled at him. "Shame on you quarrelsome pirates! Have you never said pretty nothings to a girl in foreign parts? These forward lordings are not like burgher folk. We girls of the people are to them lawful prey for courtly wits. Good blood should

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not be spilt for empty words to a woman, even though her father be Bailiff of Rye and her lover the valiant Captain Garth Aylwin. The Earl Warenne is a right dangerous enemy. If harm came to Sir William at my father's door it would be an ill day for the Port. Come, Garth, my father must see your gift."

CHAPTER III

A LETTER FOR EARL SIMON

ROGER FARR met them as they entered the hall, where the lights were already lit. But though he looked at them squarely he did not at first perceive the priceless ornament his daughter carried. His shrewd Saxon face was unusually grave, and it was on Garth rather than Rosamund that his thoughtful look was bent.

"De Warenne has just gone. Did you meet him?"

"We did—curse him!" said Garth.

"Curse him with a good heart. But why do you say so?"

The old man's glance went from Garth to his daughter, and back again.

Briefly and wrathfully the sailor outlined the parting at the gate. The Bailiff listened stolidly, and at the account of how Rosamund had averted a brawl he nodded approval.

"That was well done. I would pay a hundred crowns for him to have come and gone without meeting you, my girl. The son of John of Warenne is too great a man for an enemy. But he is also too great a man for a friend." The Bailiff looked strangely on his daughter.

"Father!" Rosamund took him by the sleeve. "What are you saying? What is William of Warenne to us?"

"We live in evil times," the jurat answered gloomily. "Sir William came hither hot-foot on the King's business. As to that, I will have a word with you, Captain. But in doing the King's business he contrived to find some for himself. And as to that, it touches both of you. This young baron demands my daughter in marriage, as he saith, the smooth liar! He raves about you, Rose. A de Warenne of the blood of the Conqueror and a burgher's daughter of Rye!

Is that not a pretty tale for minstrels to sing!" The old man's smile was sardonic, but his tone was anxious.

Rosamund crimsoned to her wimple.

"And you, sir, what did you answer?" Garth Aylwin, asking the question, had a wintry look. Somehow he mistrusted those shrewd old eyes.

"I said, Master Aylwin, neither yea nor nay. What was such as I to say to such as he? I said that as Bailiff of Rye I must think first of the King's Majesty and his affairs, and that when those were attended to would be time enough to consider my own poor matters and those of my daughter, who, thank God, was, I said, a dutiful and obedient girl. And such other things I said as the disturbance of my wits allowed. For, let me remind you, the Earl Warenne is a mighty man. What would you have had me say, in common prudence?"

"I would have had you say, sir: 'My daughter is pledged, Lord William, and therefore you cannot have her—in marriage as you say, or in any way soever.'"

"There speaks imprudent youth!" said the Bailiff with a weary smile. "But I would have you observe, Captain, that in the first place Rose is not pledged, and in the second that I have no wish to see this town of Rye laid in ruins by my lord of Lewes. We barons of the Ports stand in none too good odour with the King, and it is well known that we have trafficked with the Earl of Leicester and his lords. If Warenne proclaim us rebels, and march against us in strength, can Captain Garth Aylwin save us from his vengeance?"

The question, in those grim days of savage civil war, was a searching one. The sailor looked into the keen eyes of the Bailiff with sullenly throbbing pulses and thunderous brows.

"And when this whelp comes back?" he asked.

The Bailiff shrugged heavily. "He who lives the longest will see the most. Two heads are better than one, even though the one be old and passably cunning and the other young and hot. You and I, Master Aylwin, must talk together. And you, Rose, must see that dinner is got ready.

A Letter for Earl Simon

A man plans best on an empty stomach, but acts best on a full one."

With this piece of Saxon philosophy Farr beckoned the sea-captain to follow him to a private room.

It was a little room which looked out, through the closely leaded panes of its single window, across the wide estuary of the harbour to the storm-swept remnant of old Winchelsea and the open Channel. Farr walked to the window and stood there, motioning his companion to a bench beside him.

"In this business," said he deliberately, "our brethren of Winchelsea and the other Ports stand in with us of Rye."

"In what business, sir?" Garth's cold and hostile tone exhibited little interest.

"The business of the ships. You have sworn the oaths of a freeman and baron to-day, Captain. To uphold, against all enemies whatsoever, the Brotherhood of the Ports, their rights and privileges."

"What has that to do with the Earl Warenne?"

"Very much." From the folds of his scarlet robe the Bailiff drew a parchment. "Listen to this message delivered to my hands an hour since by that Earl's son." He unrolled the scroll with great deliberation, and the sailor saw that it bore the great waxen circle of the royal seal. Farr read slowly and carefully, like a man not too well versed in the exercise:

"To our faithful barons and freemen of the Port of Rye in Sussex, greeting in the Saviour of all. Whereas certain of our lieges, led astray by evil counsels and false tongues, have allied themselves with that abominable traitor, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, and have waged war upon our person and stirred up bloody strife throughout our realm, now therefore we straitly charge and command you to man and equip forthwith that fleet of your ships of Rye whose service by your charters is due to our assistance, and order the same with all speed to embark and sail for our city of London, namely five good ships, each provided with twenty-one men and a boy, stoutly armed, and victualled for fifteen days at the least. In this see that ye fail not on pain of our great displeasure. Given at Oxford, this 5th day of February, in the year of our redemption, 1264."

Farr drew a long breath and looked up from his reading. "What make you of that, Captain?"

"The *Royal Richard* shall sink at her moorings ere I fight her in the same cause as the Earl's son of Warene," vowed Garth.

Farr considered him gravely. "Young man, there is more in it than that, and so you will learn when you have been a little longer at home. This Earl Simon and his men, herein denounced as traitors, we the barons and freemen of the Ports do regard as instruments of God to deliver this unhappy land from oppression beyond bearing, extortion beyond paying, and ruin beyond repair. This Earl Simon, whom our lord King Henry hates as the head and fount of rebellion, we of the people, who by the labour of our hands bear up King and barons and all the structure of the State, bless as our saviour from tyranny, and call him St Simon the Righteous. Look you: he hath fought mightily against the foes of God in the lands where God's Son was made flesh; he hath confounded the King's enemies in France, where no other could put them down; and now, for all that he stands so near the throne, he has dared, after long patience, to champion the liberties of Englishmen against the injustice of the King himself. I say, God save the Earl of Leicester!"

At this unwonted outburst from the stolid old merchant-baron the seaman stood in some amazement. "Why, then, so say I, with all my heart," he agreed. "That the Earl of Leicester is a great man I know. Among the armies of the Crusaders his name rings like a trumpet. No man since King Richard has raised his name so high among the infidels. But since the King has called upon us Ryers——"

"To cut our own throats! To sail to London, where Earl Simon is drilling the citizens, and to strike at our own liberties by attacking them!"

"Then we will refuse obedience! And when next the son of Warene rides here from Lewes he shall feel our sea-gulls' beaks!"

The old Bailiff gave the Captain a sidelong, crafty look, and shook his head slowly. "One deals not thus with kings," said he. "In a matter of this gravity it behoves poor men

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to hold fast by the hand of prudence, Master Aylwin. Whether the Earl of Leicester and his lords will incline the King's heart to reason, or whether—which the saints forbid!—they will be miserably overthrown, God only knoweth, Who knoweth all. But this I tell you of a surety, that we of the Ports are of one mind, and that our standard will not be seen upon the Thames.”

“We might show it, sir, upon the Ouse, and see if Lewes Castle will stand against the Portsmen.”

Smiling, the Bailiff shook his grey head again. “Boy, Lewes Castle is a hard nut to crack, and a Norman baron is a more dangerous quarry than a Saracen Dey. No. In this storm of universal war, Captain, we Portsmen must watch our course, or come to grievous shipwreck.”

“Then, in God's name, sir, what will you do? For something you must do.”

“Something we have done already. As touches us of Rye, read this. The other Ports, each as they receive the King's commands, will do likewise.”

His Worship drew forth a second parchment, swinging from which the sailor saw the seal of the barons of Rye. On one side of the seal was a ship in full sail with a man bearing a banner standing on her poop, on the other side the device of a church, with the Virgin and Child, and in the sky above them the sun, moon, and stars, and underneath a lettered scroll: *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus.*

The new freeman turned the familiar seal thoughtfully in his hand ere he unrolled the scroll.

“Read it! Read it!” the Bailiff urged.

So Garth read aloud:

“To the high lord, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, greeting from the barons and freemen of Rye. Be it known to your high lordship that we have safely received your message. Also that we of the Ports have taken counsel together as touching the distressed state of the realm of England, whose gates we hold in charge. And whereas our bounden duty is at all times upon the King's command to furnish forth ships and men, each according to our quota, for the protection of the said realm and to make

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warfare upon our enemies, therefore we continue always to bear in mind this duty. Yet at this present time our merchants and seamen are so distressed by poverty, and all our substance by heavy taxation so miserably reduced, that even should the King's Majesty send to us for aid, we are not able, save with great difficulty and delay, to provide those things for the King's service which our charters ordain to be provided. Moreover, by reason of the said poverty of our town, the ships of our seamen are so outworn and unsafe, being in grievous need of repair, that only with the greatest labour can a few vessels be made ready, with much hazard, to put to sea, the expense whereof we have no means to defray. And even if with the help of God we could contrive to send them forth, it would be to the great peril of the nation, inasmuch as the whole of our Ports would thereby be left full open and unprotected for a prey to the King's enemies by sea. Wherefore we continually pray that our lord the King may have no present need to call upon us, but that until a better time be on us we may have leisure to improve our miserable condition and repair our vessels now so direfully impoverished, and put them and ourselves in that state in which we would have them, for the honour of the King's Majesty and the safety of the realm. May God and His saints have your Grace in keeping."

The sailor handed back this precious document with a puzzled look. "That is to Earl Simon, not to the King."

"The King's answer must wait," said the Bailiff. "I gave no answer to my young lord of Warrenne, save that the King's commands should have the dutiful attention of his Portsmen. Well?"

"I perceive, sir, there is more in clerkship than I thought."

"But what think you of this letter, Captain?"

"May I English it for you, Master Farr, according to my thoughts?"

"If you will."

"Then as I read it it says: 'God speed you, my lord of Leicester, and you may count on us of the Ports that devil a ship of ours will sail against you.' Am I right?"

The Bailiff stroked his chin with a hairy hand, and, sitting down confidentially on the bench beside Garth, "Indeed," he admitted, with his slow smile, "it might be so interpreted. And what do you deduce from that?"

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"Why, that if the King's friends should get that letter in their hands the Bailiff of Rye and some others are like to feel their necks too loose to be comfortable."

"Therefore, Captain, it must go by a sure hand. And whose hand surer than yours?"

The sailor started up. "Mine? Why mine, Master Farr?"

"You speak too loud." The Bailiff rose in his turn, though with more deliberation, and laid a hand on the young man's shoulder. He was shorter than Garth, a sedate figure in his scarlet. "You would have my daughter, would you not?"

"She is the star of all my hopes, sir."

"And I would right gladly have you for son, Garth, for your father was my friend when we were young, and you have carried your father's name to honour. But I sore mistrust that black-eyed young Warene. The de Warennes are a fierce and fiery breed, and who baulks them puts his head in the lion's mouth. There must be some spell upon the girl to have inflamed him thus in an hour. Had he had a score of riders instead of half a dozen I swear he would have carried her with him. I count it certain he will return."

The storm-cloud came back into Aylwin's face. "God helping me," said he, "I will meet him when that time comes, and kill him, were his father twenty times an earl!"

But the prudent old merchant shook his head. "Great lords are not so easily slain. But now you see that it is you who must take this letter to de Montfort, to let him know the Ports are at his back. You more than any man are concerned to see that letter to its destination. We of the Ports have understood long since that in this struggle we must stand for one side or the other. And since from the Earl there is promise of justice and freedom, and from the King there is certainty of oppression and ruin, we will uphold the Earl with all our might, and close our gates henceforth to the King. But we dare not yet proclaim ourselves too openly. Therefore, having written cautiously to Earl Simon, and in such wise as to leave ourselves a means of excuse if his cause miscarries, we shall also write in due course warily and humbly to the King."

"Much your caution and your clerkship will avail if this letter go astray!"

"Therefore, I say, get me the letter with all speed to Earl Simon, wheresoever he be found, and Rosamund shall be yours. De Montfort must understand through you that we cannot yet join him in the field, for we have need of men to hold the Ports in case the Earl Warenne or other of the King's friends descend upon us. Will you take it?"

"Will I! Master Farr, if the Earl of Leicester sat in hell's own gate I would go to him gaily for such a prize. But swear to me on the Cross that if I do this you will hold no traffic with the damned Warenne, nor so much as admit him within your walls till I am back from my errand." Aylwin drew his sword from its sheath and held it by the shining blade before the old man. "Swear, Bailiff!"

"I swear," the Bailiff said laying hand on the hilt. "God witness my oath."

The seaman rolled up the perilous parchment and bestowed it safely under his coat. "Now order me as you will, Master Farr."

"Then listen. De Warenne came hither from Winchelsea, and to-night—such is the King's haste—goes on to Kent. You too must ride to-night, London-wards, to seek the Earl of Leicester. You should be armed, and in company. Whom will you take?"

"Two of my fellows from the *Richard*. No others can I trust so well. But, meanwhile, what of my ship? She has a rich cargo, and we who have fought her out and home are like brethren among ourselves. There is a share due to each, and payment should not wait."

"You shall deliver me, if you will, a writing setting forth each man's share, and I will pay it, and hold the ship in security till your return. Will that content you?"

"It should content them all. I will see Diccon Lightfoot, my lieutenant, before I leave, and arrange the matter."

"Good. Now come and eat, for time presses."

They passed into the great common hall, in which the well-filled tables were now set for the afternoon meal, and Garth was placed at the upper end with the Bailiff and his daugh-

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ter. Nothing was said during the meal of the high matters just debated, but for the delectation of the household Garth was called on to relate his voyages and adventures. He told his story with a rough simplicity, with thought but for one single auditor, feasting his eyes on every look of the young hostess, on whose bosom his precious love-pledge lay. Much he asked, too, in his turn, of the state of the country, the bitter strife between the factions of the King and the barons, and the affairs of the Port.

When the meal was over, the tables removed, and the retainers of the household busied about the hall at the employments or diversions of a winter-evening, the Bailiff sat himself down beside the great hearth and called his daughter to him.

"Rose," said he bluntly, "I have this day promised you in marriage to Captain Aylwin. What say you?"

Rosamund glanced swiftly at her lover, then looked into the fire. "Why, sir, I hope I am obedient."

"Yet I would not have you wed against your will. Others have sought you, and one whom to cross is dangerous. William of Warenne is a high lord, and will be a higher. How if you should be lady of Lewes Castle?"

The Bailiff's voice made the question sneer at itself, but Rosamund, though the colour flamed a moment in her cheeks, smiled happily into the glowing logs.

"Falcons do not mate with thrushes," said she.

"Yet the falcon is a strong bird and fierce, ranging far and swooping swiftly," said the Bailiff gravely.

"The white sea-gull is a strong bird too. I would rather dwell in the sea-gull's nest than the falcon's eyrie." Rosamund glanced up, and her eyes rested with a shining pride on the white tunic of her sailor.

Farr nodded approval. "A baron of Rye for a maid of Rye! Yet if you are to wed you must first be parted awhile. Captain Aylwin rides to-night for London."

"For London! To-night! Oh, why?"

"To assure the safety of us all. These are dangerous times, Rose."

"But to-night." The confident happiness of love went

pale. "And he but just returned! Father, the roads will be impassable!"

Garth came close and took her hand, smiling down into her eyes. "When one has come from Barbary, sweetheart, it is not so far to London."

"Have no fear, Rose," the Bailiff said. "When he has spoken to his lieutenant you will give him the best horse from the stables, and see to his provision for the journey. The sooner he is away the sooner he will be back, and the safer we shall all sleep at night. You have the letter, Captain?"

"I have it safe, sir."

"Then God and Our Lady keep you!"

An hour later Rosamund led her lover into the Bailiff's stables and herself picked out for his use a great grey mare of powerful build. She had the animal saddled and bridled, and saw that the saddlebags were well filled, and while she ordered these things in the dim lantern light amid the stable churls she stood calm and proud like a princess.

When the mare was ready, and nothing remained but to mount and away, she took the creature's rein in one hand and held out the other to Aylwin. He took it in his, and they set out across the dark courtyard, Garth's men being already in the road without.

Suddenly she dropped the rein and flung her arms about her lover, and buried her face on his shoulder. "Oh, my dear!" she whispered, "it is hard to let thee go so soon! After so long waiting, and so many dangers overcome! Garth, come back quickly!"

"Sweetheart!" He held her close and stroked her dark hair. "Here is nothing to dread. A dark road is no worse for a good horse than the pathless sea for a sound ship. If our Sussex tracks are heavy going they harbour no pirate strongholds such as lie a-many 'twixt here and heathendom. With good luck, and this brave beast, a week may see your father's errand done, and me back here in Rye. And then hey for a priest and a long rest from voyaging! You shall bloom in my own garden then, my Rose of the World!"

"My father is an understanding man, who sees a long way onward," she said. "He has not told me why you ride

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to London, but I can guess. As Bailiff of Rye this warfare of the King and his barons puts him in great peril. Which-ever way things go, his risk and the risk of all the Ports is heavy. Moreover, this year it is the turn of Rye to provide the Speaker for the Brotherhood. If the Earl of Leicester goes down, how shall my father save himself from the hangman?"

"Why, if it should come to that, dear one, where should he save himself but aboard my *Royal Richard*, that could take us all to new fortunes overseas, where the sun shines warmer than ever it shines here? But with all the best of England at his back how shall Earl Simon go down? Rather shall King Henry himself lose his crown. In the morning you will forget these fears. There! The mare is pawing to be off. Send me away with a kiss, my Rosamund!"

Her lips clung to his. Then he got into the saddle, and for a last moment her hand rested on his knee. "Come back before Sir William!" she whispered urgently.

"Never fear!" With a laugh he rode away, out into Watchbell Street and through the darkened town, under the great round towers of the Landgate into the open country.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE RIPPERS' TRACK

THOUGH it was to the sea that he owed his making, Aylwin was no fish out of water when ashore. Long before his reckless daring had made his name a by-word among his fellow-mariners he had taken as a lad many wild rides with the 'owlers,' the illicit exporters of the wool of Romney Marsh, helping to bring many a rich pack-train to the coast for transmission to France and Flanders, in defiance of the King's law for the protection of home wool merchants, and to the great, though secret, profit of local flock-masters—Master Farr among the rest. The tracks for a score of miles inland were old friends of his, and although even with a good horse it was no picnic in those days to cross the miry swamps of the Kent and Sussex borderlands he had no fear of losing his way.

A thin young moon hung in the western sky as he struck northward along the Rippiers' Track, whereby the Ryers were wont to dispatch their regular quotas of fish for the royal table. There was a bite of frost in the air, and the mare's hoofs rang sharply on the rough road that ran down from the town to the low marshland where the widening Rother glimmered under the moon. The tide had ebbed, and before the flood set in he must be over the ford and mounting the height of land to Wittersham. There, safely past the estuary, he counted on a few hours' rest.

Often in his roving had he dwelt on the day when he should be once more in his own land. But his visions had never forecast a situation like this—his suit indeed successful, but a mission of State laid on him in the interests of his Port, and stretching its dubious adventure between him and his

On the Rippers' Track

goal. Never had he pictured himself riding thus through the winter night to seek the greatest baron in England.

The aspect of his homeland seemed strange to him after his long absence. The stars even in the frosty air were dim in comparison with their brilliance in the lands and seas whence he had come. The twinkling Wain in front of him, with its pointers to the Pole, encouraged him like the face of a friend. He mounted the deep cut that ran straight up Playden Hill, and stood still for a few moments with his two companions to gaze about him at the black arms of huge trees, gaunt in their wintry bareness. Then they crossed the broad, rolling plateau, dented with shallow, twisting valleys, and deep with the gloom of the forest which yielded the timber for the ships and houses of Rye, dropping down again through Iden by a steep-pitched slope to the level of the river at the estuary's head.

The moon was lower when Aylwin came to the mud-banks at the river's edge, but memory and instinct took him to the ford, and cautiously they waded over the broad, chill stream. Once on the hard again the Captain put his mare to a canter, to warm her blood after the crossing.

The last faint silver of the setting moon showed him the black line of the Wittersham heights ahead, with here and there the twinkle of a homestead light. The deep woods gloomed again to right and left. Suddenly, as though leaping from the earth, flaring torches blazed across the path, and a rough voice cried "Halt!"

The travellers' horses shied at the sudden glare, and with difficulty Garth reined in.

"Who calls 'halt' to a baron of Rye?" he wrathfully demanded.

A scorning laugh answered. The torchlight gleamed on arms and armour. "Noble and puissant lord," came a mocking voice which Aylwin remembered, "the King hath many enemies. Why do you ride thus hastily at night?"

Garth's blood raged, but his thoughts flew to the letter in his tunic. "I ride fast because I am in haste, sirrah! Also I ride armed. Stand clear!"

"He rides armed!" the voice mocked again. "Save us!

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It is our cockerel of Rye. What did I tell you, fellows? I warrant he carries some message from that wily fox the Bailiff. Have at him!"

"To me!" roared Garth to his men, and, drawing, stuck his heels into the mare's ribs. She sprang straight for the line of torches. A flaming pine-branch came flying, striking the mare between the eyes. She reared wildly, but Garth kept the saddle and forced her on. As she bounded forward he struck with all his force at a dark shape that came at him with a shine of steel, and felt his sword bite home. But in the same moment a horseman charged him on the flank. The mare pawed madly and fell struggling, crushing him beneath her. The night rushed down on him and he knew no more.

Meanwhile, his two shipmates had fared no better. They followed like true men when he charged, but one got a dagger in the throat, and lay dying; the other, dragged from his horse, and set upon by three assailants together, made so desperate a resistance that for a moment he cleared a space about him. Then they rushed him, and though one got his death-blow the sailor's voyagings were ended.

The band closed round Garth. One threw himself on the head of the kicking mare, while another dragged her unconscious rider from the peril of the lashing hoofs. The mare, when they released her, got on her feet and bolted into the darkness, but Aylwin lay motionless in the flicker of the torchlight.

The leader of the band, in full war harness, dismounted from his horse, thrust up the visor of his barrel-helmet, and bent over the fallen man. A smile of satisfied triumph was on his dark face as he straightened again. "We fooled that Bailiff well," said he. "The traitorous Saxon dog! Come, Arthur, your knife. We will see what loyal message this valiant baron of Rye carries to his King."

Without troubling to unlace the leathern jacket which Aylwin wore for warmth and protection, he ripped open the clothing of the unconscious man, and quickly discovered the Bailiff's letter with its great seal. He read it by the dancing light of the torches, and as he read he smiled again.

On the Rippiers' Track

"A clever letter, by my soul! The Bailiff must have sweated over its composition. And he shall sweat yet more! The rascal is a man of substance, Arthur, who can pay good gold to keep his head on his shoulders. With this letter in my hands he is my very humble servant. And he and his shall serve me rarely!"

"And this Rye, my lord?" the squire asked. "Shall we string him to a branch before we leave him?"

"No. He is alive, and I would have a word with him. Give him liquor."

The mouthpiece of a leathern bottle was put to Aylwin's bloodless lips. One of his captors bathed his face and raised his head. Presently the Captain opened his eyes with a groan.

Dazed and sick, he beheld about him the dark woods, the bodies on the ground, the faces of his enemies flickering in the torchlight.

"Noble Baron and valiant Captain——"

The mocking voice brought Aylwin suddenly to himself. Surely that was Sir William de Warenne! He tried to hold up his head, but his strength seemed utterly gone. He could only lie and blink in the glare. At last he uttered his enemy's name.

De Warenne took a step nearer, and held up the letter for de Montfort. "You know me, cockerel?" smiled he. "Last time we met I promised you a lesson, but did not hope the instruction would come so soon."

Garth saw the seal of Rye hanging from the parchment, and his blood ran chilled. The man had him absolutely cornered. He summoned his failing senses for a desperate effort.

"Braggart of Warenne," said he, "if you have turned highwayman for vengeance, cut my throat and begone. But if for gain, I have treasure that will build you another castle of Lewes. All I have I will give you for that letter, and they will tell you in Rye I am a man of my word."

The young knight laughed. "Brave Captain, with this letter in my hand I am so amply paid that I will take no more from you. For this letter serves both the King's cause

and my own. 'There is a business I would transact with your worshipful Bailiff, but he hangs back somewhat. Yet with this parchment on my side I dare swear he will consider my proposition more kindly.' He stooped till his dark, smiling face was close to Aylwin's. "Some day soon, Captain, if you live, you shall lie in a dungeon at Lewes and hear the revelry we make when I bring a certain pretty bird of Rye to sing in my cage yonder!"

Every ounce of his fading strength the sailor put into the feeble blow he drove between the cruelly smiling eyes, cursing de Warenne between his set teeth. But the knight drew back laughing, and rose, turning to his men.

"This dog has left us an empty saddle or two. Set him on one, and hold him there, two of you, for I think he will scarcely ride alone."

They lifted Garth, more dead than alive, and carried him to where some of them had tied their horses. They put him on one, and, mounting, rode slowly off along the track.

Garth rode as in a nightmare, reeling from side to side, racked with agony at every movement of his horse and with every breath he drew, for his fall had broken several ribs and he had lost blood freely from a severe wound in the thigh. His captors had bound this up roughly, but the motion soon loosened the bandages, and before long he swooned clean away, and would have fallen but for the men at his side.

"May it please you, lord, our man is dying," cried one of these.

"Nay, by Our Lady, it does not please me at all!" answered William, turning his horse. "He is a traitor, and must be saved for a traitor's end. There must be men somewhere in this wilderness. Ride on, one of you, and when you find a hut command them in the name of Warenne to make ready for a guest."

One of the band spurred forward, and the rest, after tying the prisoner on the horse, followed at a slower pace.

After a time the scout returned, and reported a hermitage at a little distance. The hermit, he declared, had reviled him in most ungodly terms for disturbing him at his midnight devotions, but the powerful name of Warenne had

On the Rippers' Track

put a spell on him, and there was a bed of rushes in his cell for the injured man. Thereupon the cavalcade continued its way to the foot of a steep rise, where a feeble light glimmered across the track.

Here they found a rude shelter, hollowed out in the side of the hill, partly roofed by the spreading roots of a great fallen tree, enlarged by walls of piled stones, and covered by a few rough planks. In the entrance stood a bearded man of monstrous size, leaning on a great staff like a giant's club. His matted, grizzled hair overhung a face at once fierce and cunning. A ragged cassock was gathered about his middle by a cord, and his sandalled feet were planted aggressively apart. He glowered at his visitors with a most unchristian look.

"Who disturbs a servant of God at his prayers?" he demanded.

"Holy and venerable man," said the young leader cheerfully, "we bring you a broken body to mend and a sinful soul to cleanse for Paradise. You who are vowed to good works will not refuse the one mission or the other. He whom we bring you must soon pay with his wretched life the penalty of his crimes."

"Why not dispatch him forthwith?" asked the holy man. "I will shrive him, and return to my prayers."

Sir William laughed. "Reverend one, there is so much sense in what you say that, were our man's case an ordinary one, your counsel would certainly be followed. But this fellow hath done treason against our lord the King, and must be dealt with in proper form, and at the proper time be hanged with such publicity that others may take warning. Therefore I charge you strictly to give him the benefit of your pious care until I send to fetch him to my father's castle of Lewes."

"So! I am to fatten the sheep for the slaughter? That will cost money, lord, for bread and meat do not grow on the trees in this wilderness, nor does manna in these evil days fall from heaven, even for heaven's own servants. A sick man cannot live on hermit's fare." A crafty gleam shone in the eyes that flashed beneath the giant's shaggy brows.

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"The man has money on him. Take and use it, for he will need it no more. Preserve us his body for the gallows, and I freely give you his goods." Without further parley William called two of his men, who took the now unconscious captive from his horse and laid him on the ground beside the hermit.

The latter stooped over his patient, and, having satisfied himself that the injured man carried a well-filled wallet, relaxed a little of his grimness.

"Lord," said he, "I will do your wishes as far as a poor hermit may. But if the man dies on my hands blame me not, for he seems in desperate case."

"Bah! A prick with a lance. A fall from his horse. Lusty traitors such as he do not die so easily. Holy man, you shall answer to me for his life. Therefore take good care of him till I require him of you."

With this, and a haughty nod, the young noble turned his horse and rode away with his band.

CHAPTER V

A WEDDING IN THE FOREST

THE hermit stood frowning after the departing riders.

"The fiend take you and him!" he muttered. Then he lifted his unconscious patient like a child, and carried him into the hut.

After laying Aylwin on a bed of rushes the holy man's first care was to examine his wallet by the dim lantern that burned in the hovel. The result of his examination was satisfactory, for Garth had ridden well provided. The hermit coolly transferred the wallet to his own person, and stood thoughtfully considering his charge. Presently, like the lonely man he had lately been, he fell into soliloquy.

"By the bones of Lewinna, you are a sheep worth the shearing!" he muttered, his eyes glittering in the lantern light. "With this gold of yours, my lad, a poor unfrocked monk with a bold heart and a stout arm, who remembers the Southern lands of his youth, may do better for himself than play the anchorite. Plague on this chilly northern land which has held me too long, and on the crazy preaching friars who are robbing Churchmen of their comforts! Hey for the South, my stricken benefactor—the soft and sunny South, where there is plunder for the seeking and no questions asked, and a man of brains and brawn may make himself a king!" The hermit stretched out his mighty arms and brandished his great club like a sword.

Then he knelt beside his patient and proceeded to examine his condition. He removed the leathern jacket. "Ha! The Navy of the Ports!" he exclaimed at the emblazoned tunic beneath. "So you too perchance have felt the Southern sun warm your blood and kissed a dark-eyed beauty

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from some Dey's harem? Bah! the greater fool you to come back here! If you live long enough—which I greatly doubt—you may set poor Brother Marcus on his road back to the lands of sunshine and blue waters in return for his gentle ministrations."

Murmuring thus to himself, with now and then a grim chuckle at his unlooked-for luck, the hermit attended not unskilfully to the hurts of his companion, and when this was done set himself to restore him to consciousness, bathing his face and breast with cold water.

Presently his efforts were successful. The patient moaned, and opened his eyes. He lay for a time staring vacantly at his grim nurse; then, as memory returned, he half rose up, and put his hand to his tunic.

"The letter!" he gasped. "I had a letter. It bore the seal of Rye. Are you a priest? Where is Sir William de Warenne?"

"Gently, my son! One thing at a time," growled Marcus. "Am I priest, say you? Doth a layman wear a cassock?"

"Good father, Sir William de Warenne waylaid me. I can give a fortune for my letter. Where is Warenne?"

"So you give fortunes? Ha!" The eyes of Marcus glittered. "We must take turns with our questions, my son. You will admit that is but fair. Therefore I ask: Who are you that distribute fortunes?"

"I am Garth Aylwin, freeman of Rye, captain in the Navy of the Ports"—the injured man fell back exhausted. "Who are you, priest?"

"I am your kind and gentle nurse," said the hermit with a grin. "You may call me Brother Marcus if it comforts you. My mission, entrusted to me by your loving friend Sir William, is to heal you quickly, so that you may be decently hanged as a traitor. Nevertheless, if you have fortunes at your disposition, my son, it may be I can arrange for you more happily."

"Find me Warenne!" Garth's gaze was becoming wild, and his face flushed with fever. He began to ramble in his talk, but ever returned to Warenne and his letter.

A Wedding in the Forest

"Noble Captain, Sir William is gone, and with him doubtless this letter about which you make such a song. But let us take counsel." Here the hermit bent down so that his hairy face and his gleaming, covetous eyes were close to his patient. "Put me on the track of this fortune you rave of and poor Brother Marcus will follow the villain through the woods by paths he knows of, and fall upon him unawares ere daylight. Speak freely, my son, speak freely."

He hung on the answer, but none came that was intelligible. Garth began to chatter in delirium. His limbs and body shook. His breath came painfully and irregularly, and his skin was hot and dry. The hermit crouched beside him and listened glumly, seeking to extract some clue from the sick man's babbling to that gold which alone interested him.

But the night wore on, and Garth's delirium increased. He raved of ships and fighting. Once he dragged himself up on his bed and shouted at the top of his voice, so that Marcus sprang back: "Master Farr, you are betrayed!" Constantly he fumbled for his lost letter. Constantly, too, the name of Rosamund was on his lips, now muttered with endearments, now in despairing entreaty. Sometimes he bitterly cursed de Warrene, and once, in what seemed a lucid moment, he feebly clutched the hermit's cassock, and sinking his voice to a whisper and pointing to the door, "Take your club, priest," said he, "kill me that damned thief, and I vow you a shipful of treasure for a shrine!"

"Good lad, good lad, it shall be done," answered Marcus, taking up his staff to humour him, and making as though to go to the door. "And how shall I come to this treasure-ship of yours?"

But the sick man had fallen back weakly on the rushes, and babbled incoherently.

"Come now, my son, pull yourself together! Where is this treasure?" asked Marcus.

The tortured spirit sprang to life again. "Hold her fast, Master Bailiff! Hold her from him one little minute while we cut through. Rose, I come! An Aylwin! An Aylwin!"

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"Devil take you and your Rose!" growled the hermit, angrily flinging down his staff. "And twenty devils take William of Warenne for bringing me such a lunatic bed-fellow!"

He stood wrathfully frowning over his patient for a while: then, slipping off the cord from his cassock, he bound the sailor's arms to his body, and made fast the slack of the cord to a piece of the gnarled roots that bounded one side of the hut.

"That will keep you from chasing your Rose through the woods till you can talk better sense, noble Captain," he muttered, and, betaking himself to the farthest corner of the hovel, he pulled out more rushes from a pile and lay down to sleep.

The winter sun was shining on the woods outside when he awoke, and a sunbeam gleaming through a slit in the rude stone wall which served as a window fell on the figure of his companion. Garth lay quiet now, and at first the hermit thought he was dead. On going to him, however, he found him in an uneasy sleep, beads of sweat on his face, and his brows contracted as with pain.

Marcus loosed the cord from his arms, and the sleeper stirred and muttered, but did not wake. He seemed much weaker. Leaving him, the hermit bestirred himself to make a fire, and in an iron pot heated a savoury broth, from which, and from some chunks of rye bread, he made his breakfast. When he had finished he proceeded again to examine his patient.

The sailor now lay seemingly awake, staring vacantly at the low roof of the hut. He made no movement when Marcus approached, and the hermit with a shrug went back to his fire, and, fetching a small portion of the broth, put it to the sick man's lips and raised his head.

"Drink, my son," said he. "You have slept, and you have sweated, and now if you are to live, and I to receive my pay, you must take food."

With difficulty he made Aylwin swallow some mouthfuls of the liquid, and laid him back on the rushes. "I fear it is to waste good food," said he. "My son, do you know me?"

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The patient muttered incoherently, and his eyes closed again.

"Curse you for an unsociable fellow!" said Marcus. He turned away, replenished his fire, and, after setting an empty bowl in the doorway to receive the offerings of the pious who might chance to pass, picked up his staff and took his way into the woods, where in some places he knew of there were traps set whereby a man might augment the sparseness of charity.

His excursion lasted some time, and was not unfruitful, for when he made his way back by the forest tracks a fat hare dangled beneath his cassock. On nearing his hermitage, and before he emerged from the cover of the woods, he saw with some surprise a small cavalcade approaching along the track.

A dozen riders, well armed, accompanied a large enclosed litter slung between two horses, and behind the litter rode a soberly clad woman of middle age and a young page. A train of three baggage-mules, led by a servant on foot, followed the litter, and an unmounted churl also walked at the head of each litter horse. The cavalcade came on slowly, and after gazing at it a few moments Brother Marcus made haste to reach his hut without emerging into view, so that by the time the travellers attained the hermitage he had disposed of his hare within, and sat at the door in an attitude of pious abstraction.

The procession halted opposite the hermitage, and a squire, who seemed to command the men-at-arms, pricked forward to where Marcus sat.

"Reverend sir," said he, "advise us, if you please, if this is the road for Wittersham and London."

"It is, my son."

"And what kind of road is it, Father?"

"An evil enough road, my son, with steep ascents and hollows wherein the mire is deep, and infested with evil men."

"As to the evil men," said the squire, "we can deal with them. But the lady we escort, though of high spirit, is delicately nurtured, and hath already come far to-day."

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"And who is your lady?"

"The Lady Adela of Udimore, though I know not why I should tell thee, hermit."

"I know not wherefore you should not, young sir," said Marcus sourly. He stood a few moments thoughtful, staring toward the cavalcade. "I have heard of her," he added.

"But not seen her, I warrant!" The squire dropped his voice as he spoke, and condescended to wink, glancing back over his shoulder as though to assure himself that the rest were out of earshot.

"I dwell in solitude, thinking on high matters," said Marcus ponderously. "What have I to do with fair women?"

"Why, nothing, holy hermit. Yet the greater now your opportunity if my lady craves permission to rest awhile in your hermitage. For in that case you will benefit, I swear, both in body and soul." The squire grinned impudently.

Marcus turned on him with a forbidding frown. "My son, either you jest, which is unseemly, or you speak in foolish riddles, which I have no leisure to guess."

"Holy sir, I speak in sober earnest," the young man assured him, though his face belied his words. "For my lady is so beautiful that the sight of her will gladden the heart even of a hermit, and the seduction of her is such that in resisting it your soul will acquire great merit."

An ominous flash showed for a moment under the thunderous brows of Marcus. He made a motion toward his great staff, which lay at the door, but checked his impulse as the impudent youth reined backward.

"Go your ways," he growled, "you and your lady. *Retro, Sathanas!* I have heard of her, I say. A dangerous ensnarer of men!"

The youth's fresh face gleamed with mischief as he glanced again behind him. "True, holy sir," he answered. "My lady carries in her eyes a spell to bind all hearts. Yet upon the rock of your virtue her shafts would fall unavailingly, to the magnifying of your credit with heaven."

"Go!" cried Marcus. "Keep me no longer from my prayers."

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But the squire, a shameless, sportive fellow, persisted. "Come, venerable man, what know you of my lady, that you so condemn her?"

"Enough, and too much," answered Marcus with a heavy assumption of virtue. "I know that when the valiant knight her father would have wed her she obstinately and undutifully refused, declaring that she preferred the homage of many to the bondage of one. That in dying he gave the wardship of her, his one child, to the Abbot of Robertsbridge, ordering that she should be allowed to dwell in his castle and lands, but that the revenues should go to the Abbey until such time as she should be of age and marry, and that if she married not within a year of her majority his whole estate should pass to the endowments of the Abbey and she should take the veil. And I know that she is now of age, that many knights have dallied in the enchanted woods of Udimore, and many dames have had cause to curse the name of Adela."

"Hermit, I marvel at the accuracy of your knowledge," said the squire, "and more particularly at how you came by it in your virtuous solitude."

"My son, I have been at Robertsbridge," answered Marcus, though he did not add that he had been expelled from that community. "Moreover, even in these lonely woods men speak of your lady and her doings."

"Yet even the plenitude of your information, holy sir, lags a little behind the times, since you know not that my lady travels now to London, with intent, it is said, to find a husband ere her days of grace be spent. It is even thought, indeed, that a noble knight of this county hath chained her fancy—the Earl Warenne's son Sir William, now serving the King in his wars."

This made the brawny hermit look up quickly at the horseman from under his shaggy brows. "A fierce young hawk!" he muttered. "Has he too fed from her hand?"

"And not from her hand only," grinned the squire. "But either she could not hold him, or he could not hold her, and for three months past Sir William hath been a stranger to

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Udimore Woods, where formerly she had him as tame as any pigeon. Since then my lady has been a torment to us all. Holy hermit"—the talkative youth looked back again apprehensively—"I would fain enjoy longer the advantage of your virtuous conversation, yet if I do not quickly report to my lady I fear it will be the worse for me. Therefore, pray you, give permission for her to rest awhile in your shelter."

"She will find little comfort here," said Marcus, his curiosity whetted by what he had learned. "And her only company will be a dying man."

"How! A dying man?"

"One who was brought hither last night from the forest, and who has, I think, but few hours to live."

"Death and my lady will be poor company," said the squire. "But I will inform her."

He rode back to the cavalcade, but Marcus saw that instead of proceeding the riders presently dismounted, while the litter, accompanied by the squire and the waiting woman, approached his door. There it came to a stand, and its occupant alighted.

She was a lady richly dressed, and of great beauty, with shining gold-red hair, and a very fair face, whose imperious nobility was softened by the languorous appeal of her blue eyes. She wore a jewelled belt, a long cloak of bright scarlet trimmed with fur, and a loose over-tunic of grey silk.

"Good hermit," said she, "I am weary with travel, and fain would rest awhile."

Marcus stood from the door. "Madame," said he, "there is a dying man within, and no couch but a heap of rushes."

"I have seen men die before to-day, and I am tired," she answered coolly. Without waiting for an answer she passed in. Her woman and Marcus followed, and he showed her the rude couch, whereon she immediately seated herself with a sigh. The hermit's grimness melted a little at sight of her.

"Madame, there is nothing here to offer you," said he. "A hermit's fare is sparse, and his needs are few."

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"A cup of water is all I need, holy sir," said the lady. "For the rest we are well provided, and, if you will permit, will fill your larder willingly."

"Noble lady," he answered piously, "whoso giveth to God's poor shall not lack reward. I will withdraw, but if you need me I shall be at hand."

He showed the serving-woman a vessel of water standing in the hut, and, leaving them to themselves, went out to join the lady's retainers, who were taking advantage of the halt to make a meal.

At their invitation he was about to join them in their refreshment when he was interrupted by the serving-woman. "Sir Hermit, my mistress would speak with you."

With no very good grace Marcus followed her back into the hut. The Lady Adela was standing by the sick man, watching him with a thoughtful expression. She turned as the great form of the hermit darkened the doorway.

"Kate, leave us till I call," she ordered her woman.

When they were alone she faced Marcus with warm cheeks but cool gaze. "Holy sir, how long, think you, will this poor man live?"

"A day. Two days. Perhaps three at the most. God knoweth, madame."

"His mind wanders. He calls me Rose—his Rose of the World." She smiled faintly. She had beautiful red lips.

"I have heard him use that name in his fever," Marcus said.

"Who is he?"

"Madame, he says his name is Aylwin. He was brought hither in the night. There had been fighting in the forest, and he was wounded."

"Who brought him?"

Marcus considered rapidly whether the truth or an approximation were likely to be more useful, and decided for dissembling.

"Madame, a certain angry knight, whose name I did not inquire, my thoughts being set on other things than the quarrels of bloody men."

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"Ah! And what said the knight?"

"That I was to keep his prisoner till he should send for him to be decently hanged."

"Ah!" said the lady again, and stood thinking. Presently she said: "You think the man cannot live?"

Marcus bent his head in assent. Suddenly the voice of the sick man broke in on their talk. "Rose, Rose, come to me!"

At the entreaty in the tone the Lady Adela glanced from the hermit to the couch, and, going to Aylwin's side, knelt and laid a hand on his brow.

Garth, his eyes bright with fever, seized the hand and covered it with kisses. He rambled awhile incoherently, and then, sitting half up, "Rose!" he cried, "we must be wed. I must take you away and set you safe, where he cannot come at you. Then I will kill him. I will recover the letter, and all will be well. Do you hear me, Rosamund? Sweetheart, say you will wed me now!"

"Yes, I will wed you," said Adela slowly. "Indeed, I see it will be best. Have no fear. I go to bring a priest." She laid her hand again upon his forehead, and, rising, drew Marcus away to the end of the hovel, behind the sick man's head and out of sight.

"You hear, Sir Hermit?" she whispered, suddenly bright-eyed and eager. "The man is of good condition, is he not?"

"A Captain, he says, in the Navy of the Ports, and a freeman of Rye, madame."

"Therefore a baron," said she.

Marcus shrugged. "A baron of the Ports."

"Bah! A baron is a baron. And the barons of the Ports uphold the King's canopy when he is crowned, do they not? You hear what the man says. You are a priest. Wed us!"

Marcus opened his eyes at that. "Wed you?" he repeated. "Are you not Adela of Udimore?"

"I said wed us!" she told him. "What matters who I am, so I am not wed already? The poor fool thinks I am his lady-love. He is dying, and he will never know. In any

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case, wedded I will be!" She threw back her beautiful head with a haughty authority, and Marcus, who was no fool, read danger in the lightning of her blue eyes. "I will call my woman and my squire to witness," she said.

Marcus the hermit began to feel himself wading in deep waters. The name of Adela of Udimore was not obscure, and Warenne was one of the great names of England. He felt his neck tickling. "Madame——" he faltered. "In God's name!"

"Yes, yes. It is in God's name, I know, that you do your work. Therefore take comfort that the work is good. Moreover, it shall not go unfee'd. But rest assured that if it is not done my men shall leave an empty hermitage here."

Marcus drew his great figure to its height, scowling thoughtfully. "If I do this, madame—I say not I will do it, for my conscience is troubled—but if I do, what of your husband?"

"My husband? What mean you, priest? I have no husband."

"Your husband that is to be. This captain here."

"I take him with me. The poor fool's wits are so far gone that with my hand in his he will die content. I could pity his mistress to lose so faithful a lover!"

"If you take him with you," Marcus said, "how shall I answer to that blustering knight when he returns? My fee is like to be a rope about my neck."

"Your neck tickles?" asked the lady, mild contempt on her red lips. "And your heart panteth not after the joys of Paradise? Holy sir, we understand each other. Have you uses for gold?"

Marcus wilted a little at her scornful frankness, and answered surlily. "Rightly employed, gold may do great good."

"It will be for you so to employ it, holy sir," said she. "So let us waste no more breath. Wed me to this dying seaman and take your fee"—she slipped her jewelled girdle and flung it at his feet—"or refuse me and I call my servants, denounce you for an insult to my honour, and have you

forthwith hanged from the nearest tree. Here are two persons desirous to wed. Choose quickly: will you wed them?"

"On your head be it, madame!" replied the solitary. But his eyes glinted covetously at the jewelled belt.

The Lady Adela went to the door and called her woman and her squire. They stood together in the dimness of the hut and watched her, wondering. Pale now, save for a spot of red on either cheek, but with a haughty air, and head thrown back defiantly, she addressed them.

"I have brought you to see a thing I would have remembered," said she. "But it is to be remembered with a dumb tongue till I order otherwise, if you would not have me your enemy. Kate, your marriage ring!"

"Madame—my marriage ring?"

"Do I not speak clearly? Your ring, woman!"

Cowed by the flash in Adela's blue eyes, the serving-woman obeyed, drew the ring from her finger, and held it out with a trembling hand. The lady gave it to the hermit, whom she then led to the couch where Aylwin lay.

"My dear," said she, softening her voice, "here is the good priest who will wed us. Tell him your name and condition, as I have told him mine."

"Holy Father," murmured the sick man, "I am Garth Aylwin, Captain in the Navy of the Ports, freeman and baron of Rye."

The hermit bent over the bridegroom's recumbent form, and hurriedly gabbled the marriage service, while the staring squire and the serving-woman fell on their knees. At the proper moment Marcus placed the servant's ring in the sick man's hand, and Garth, still in the delusions of his fever, set it unsteadily on the finger of his bride. "Whom God hath joined," muttered Marcus, "let no man put asunder!"

The Lady Adela rose from the couch, her face aflame. "Take my husband to the litter," she ordered.

The squire, scared and bewildered, called a couple of men, and they carried Garth out of the hut. By his side, holding his right hand in her own, walked the Lady Adela, while the patient, in a false Paradise of content, pillowed his head on

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the squire's supporting arm. They laid him beside his bride on the cushions of the litter, and the cavalcade wound away along the forest track.

Alone in his hut, Marcus, the unfrocked monk, sat greedily fingering the jewelled girdle, and weaving visions of a sunny palace in the lands of the South.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN AYLWIN'S AWAKENING

IF Captain Garth Aylwin had died at this pass in his affairs, as the Lady Adela of Udimore expected, and indeed hoped, there would be nothing more to be said.

The times being what they were, it speaks well for the lady that he was still living when she got him to London. It is more, perhaps, that, having got him thither alive, she spared no generous devotion to keep him so.

Though noble on her dead father's side, the lady had an uncle, one Richard Dycard, a prosperous merchant of the city, to whom she was wont to resort on her occasional visits to the capital, and in whose substantial dwelling near London Bridge she was used to lord it in a manner very satisfying to herself.

When, therefore, after hanging for some weeks between life and death, Garth began to look about him again with a mind free from the distortions of fever he became accustomed to a large and pleasant room hung with rich tapestries, its floor strewn with clean rushes, and its great fireplace a cheerful blaze of glowing logs. Most often his sole companion in the room was a sober-faced matron, who said her name was Kate, and who fed him and ministered to his comfort with a stolid persistence which refused to be beguiled into conversation. If he questioned her she would shake her head, and answer respectfully, "Sir, I do not know." If he pressed her, "Sir, you must ask my mistress," she would say.

But sometimes, in place of this wooden attendant, a being of a different order would dispel the solitude. A lovely lady, blue-eyed and young and proud, with hair like a golden au-

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reole when it caught the sun's rays from the window, with jewelled fingers and fine clothes of silk and velvet. He first saw her with a sane mind as he awoke one day from a long sleep, and for the moment he thought himself dreaming, though in his dream he had been with dark-haired Rosamund of Rye. The lady was standing by his bedside, watching him with a curious intentness. As he lay in silent wonder and gazed at her, the colour deepened a little in her cheeks.

"You begin to mend, Captain Aylwin. You will soon be a man again," she said.

"Madame, the sooner the better," he answered. "I have much to do and much to learn. I am nursed kindly, yet most mysteriously."

The vision smiled faintly, but said nothing.

"Will you teach me, madame?" asked Garth.

"What?"

"Where I am, and who are you who honour my bedside, and whom I seem to have known before, yet cannot recall."

"You are in London, and I am Adela of Udimore."

"Ah!" Aylwin lay awhile, trying to piece together the tangled memories of his fight, his fever, and the days of slow recovery.

"And how came I in London?"

"I was travelling hither. I found you dying, and I brought you with me," said the lady.

"God reward you, madame! But why did you do it?"

"A woman's impulse, Captain."

Such was Aylwin's weakness that tears of gratitude stood in his eyes. "Madame," he faltered, when he could order his tongue, "I am your servant for life!"

"As to that, we shall see," she answered with a wry smile. "But what of Rosamund?"

The blood rushed into the sick man's pale face. His eyes shone, and he made to sit up. "You know Rosamund Farr?" he cried.

Still with her queer smile, Adela said, "You have spoken much of her in your fever. She dwells at Rye, does she not?"

"In God's name, madame—have you news of her or of Rye?"

"Rye stands where it did," said the lady. "Of Rosamund I know less than you do, Captain." She stooped over him, smoothed his pillow, and her white hands set him back upon it. "Rest," said she. "Get back your manhood, and we will talk again."

It was three days ere she came again. Aylwin, mending fast, had spent them in the endeavour to piece together what had befallen him. Of what had passed during the earlier part of his sickness he had little notion. Of how long he had lain he knew nothing, and of the progress of the bitter war between the King and the Barons nothing.

He was lying alone when she entered and, crossing to his bed, sat down. "You are stronger, Captain," said she. "We must have you moved to the window, that you may see how the world goes."

"Ah, madame! Will you not tell me?" he begged. "I am like a man who has wandered long in a fog."

"What shall I tell you?"

"How long have I lain here?"

"It is mid-Lent."

"And the state of the kingdom, madame, since you know nothing of my town of Rye?"

"Why, what is the state of the kingdom to you? You are a traitor, are you not?"

"How, madame—a traitor?" protested Garth.

"They say that in sleep and in fever men tell the truth. Are you not friend to the Earl of Leicester?"

"If I have said it I will not deny it," answered Aylwin. "Though I have never seen him. They say Earl Simon is all England's friend."

She gave a hard little laugh. "He is no friend of mine. Nor are his friends my friends. Therefore, since you are his friend, you, who have vowed to serve me with your life, are my enemy."

"Dear lady, that can never be!"

"Dear enemy, it must needs be. Look you, at this moment my mother's brother, to whom this very house

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belongs, lies in chains, a captive of de Montfort's, because he loyally served the King."

"And yet they say Earl Simon is a proper man, who honours bravery even in an enemy. They say he well embodies his name—a knight strong and lofty, hating wrong, and splendid in chivalry."

"He may be all that," said Adela, "yet he is my enemy. And if my Uncle Dycard had had his way this strong and lofty knight of yours would be shorter by his head."

"How so, madame?"

"My uncle and others, Captain, laid a trap for him, and he was nearly taken. It was not so long ago. I saw it from this very window. Oh, he was like a very lion in his rage! He is a proper man, as you say—how else could he shake the realm of England? Straight as an arrow, though his hair is grey under his helmet. His face is long and lean. His eyes are black as night, and yet they burn under his dark, frowning brows like a restless fire. He hath a grim mouth, but when he speaks there is a magic in his tongue that binds men to him. He rides as though man and horse were one creature, and when he fights it is as if a whirlwind leaped in armour."

"You call him enemy, madame, yet you draw him in colours not hateful."

"Do I?" smiled Adela. "It must be that I am so much a woman and he so much a man. If I did not hate him perhaps I should love him."

"What was the trap they laid, madame?"

"The Earl lay in Southwark, with a small force, yet controlling London. King Henry and the Prince had been to Dover to secure the road for the King's friends from Normandy, but your stiff-necked rebels of the Ports shut their gates against him, and Richard de Grey, the Constable, sent him this braggart message: 'Lord King, you shall enter with nine men, but no more.' So our lord the King, having notified that bold rebel that at a more convenient season he would come and hang him from his castle wall, turned round, and, marching swiftly back, would have taken the Earl of Leicester and his followers unawares. Word was

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sent in time to his Majesty's friends in the city, and four loyal servants, of whom one was my Uncle Dycard, gathered men at night, and, falling upon the watch at the bridge gates, shut the gates behind de Montfort and threw the keys into the river, lest the rebel populace should reopen them. Then at an appointed signal the King launched his army on the traitors, hemmed in with the river and the closed bridge at their backs. Never was heard such a riot as broke out in that winter dawn when the battle began in Southwark. From every church in the city the tocsin clanged alarm; the streets were rivers of shouting men pouring towards the bridge. The Earl was caught like a wild boar at bay ringed with the hunters. He had withdrawn his force to the very edge of the river, but there was no escape. In vain they thundered on the great gates, yelling to the guard to open. Inside, a frantic crowd of citizens and men-at-arms strove in vain to open. But in the nick of time for Leicester the citizens brought up battering-rams and engines, and, working with the fury of men who knew their lives forfeit for rebellion, they burst the barriers of the bridge, and the Barons' army poured through like an iron flood. Then the gates were thrust to again and made fast, while the fighting raged on the bridge and in the near-by streets with the King's men who had broken through. But Earl Simon was master of London. My uncle fled for his life before a howling mob of citizens, and hid under the very bed you lie on. They broke the doors and dragged him forth with blows and curses. They would have torn him in pieces in the street, but the Earl at that moment came riding by with some knights, the swords still naked in their hands. 'Hold there!' cries Simon, raising his great blade. His visor was up, and his eyes blazed upon them with the fighting light still in them. Two rascals who held my uncle by either arm let go like dogs robbed of their prey. 'My lord,' says one, 'here is one of those damned aldermen who would have betrayed your Grace.' 'Is this true, old man?' says Leicester. 'Mercy, lord Earl!' moaned the old burgess on his knees. 'Small mercy you would have had on Englishmen,' says de Montfort. 'Nevertheless, since we fight for

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justice and not vengeance, you shall live. You shall pay two thousand marks towards strengthening the city's defences, and you shall lie in prison till the work be done.' The work is done, Captain, the gates of the bridge are restored, but the Earl still holds my uncle prisoner, and with him three other good men of this city who arranged that matter of the keys."

"Men who would serve him so foul a turn once might do so again," said Garth. "Earl Simon dare not risk the loss of London. He must hold it till the cause is won."

The lady's smile was disdainful. "You think your cause will triumph?"

"God knows, madame. The King is strong, and they who oppose him set their lives in pawn. If Earl Simon were king——"

"Ha! What then?"

"Why, he would be a king indeed! A king to uphold in peace and war. A prince beloved as a fountain of honour, and feared for the terror of his sword and the cunning of his brain. England would be great with such a king!" The sailor's face, thin with his illness, kindled with enthusiasm. Adela rose, and looked down on him with heightened colour and angry scorn.

"You who sing so eagerly the praises of rebellion, what say you of the pelting of the Queen?"

"What is that?" he asked.

"The gentle courtesy of these citizen dogs," said she. "It was last summer. The Queen embarked at the Tower, to go to the castle of Windsor, where she might be more secure against the insults of the rabble. But when her barge approached the bridge the mob thereon, with every mark of foul indignity and hatred, assailed her. They showered on her and her rowers mud and broken eggs and stones, and shouted curses and vile insults, so that her rowers, unable to pass, had perforce to return to the Tower. Dogs!" cried the Lady Adela with a stamp of the foot. "They should have their hands struck off and be scourged into the river!" With such explosion of her haughty wrath she left Garth to his thoughts.

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She came again, however, not many days after, her beautiful head held high, her eyes flashing. "Your friends make progress, Captain Aylwin!" said she from the foot of his couch.

"Madame?" he questioned, rising on his elbow. In the morning, he remembered, bells had rung wildly, and there had been fierce shouting without.

"These villainous townsmen have made holiday to-day," she informed him. "The King's property and his friends' they have destroyed—yes, even to their private dwellings. They have laid waste the country-house of Lord Richard, the King's own brother, at Isleworth, even to tearing up the poor gentleman's orchards and emptying the great fishpond which he lately made at a vast expense. One of these days the ravening wolves will scent a plunder here, and drag out Adela of Udimore, the Royalist, to work their will on her."

"Not while I live, madame!" cried Garth.

She laughed, but came round to his side. "A fine protection you would be, my valiant rebel! You who can scarcely yet put foot to ground without a woman's arm to steady you!"

Aylwin laid his wasted fingers on her round white arm. "Dear madame, will you not fly from this city where such dangers threaten? Return to your home in Sussex!"

"To what end?" she answered. "If there is little safety for a woman within city walls, there is none without. The roads are filled with armed bands. When a stout traitor like Captain Aylwin is assailed, how shall a weak woman escape? Besides, our Sussex coast stinks with treason, as none knows better than you, dear enemy."

She had come to call him her "dear enemy," and there was in her dealings with him a careless familiarity which, while it tickled the sailor's vanity, nevertheless inspired a certain fear of her. Her changeful bearing toward him, alternating from raillery to gentleness, puzzled him sorely. It was not in nature for him to withstand the charm of her, yet for the life of him he could not understand either why she had protected him or why she sought his company.

One day, in his stolid, forthright way, he asked her the question direct: "Madame, why do you burden your house-

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hold with the care of a poor mariner and treat him as though he were a great baron?"

Her blue eyes smiled mockingly. "I please myself, being my own mistress. Are you not, then, a great baron? They told me when I took you from the roadside that you were a baron of Rye."

"Why, and so I am," said Garth bluntly. "Yet we barons of Rye are no company for ladies of the King's Court."

"And who told you, Captain, that Adela of Udimore is a lady of the Court? I make friends—and enemies—where I will, and if I set you in their number, will you complain?"

"God forbid!" cried Garth, reddening. "Your condescension makes me for ever your servant and your helpless debtor."

"Not so helpless, perhaps," said she. "You have helped me once, and may yet help me again."

"How! I have helped you? How can such a useless log help Adela of Udimore?"

"Some day I may tell you," she answered, with her intriguing smile. "Know, meanwhile, that when I set you in my litter on the road to Wittersham I never thought to bring you alive to London."

"And yet you say I have helped you! My lady, you speak in riddles."

"An exercise for your strengthening wits, Captain. I thought you would have served me by dying, but since we have become better acquainted I believe you may serve me better living—at least, for a time." The blue eyes watching him melted a little as she spoke, for though that service which she meditated might cost his life, his helplessness and his manhood alike appealed to her.

"God grant it, madame!" said Aylwin gravely.

Adela laughed at that. "Make haste to be well, and we shall see," said she, and left him wondering.

Thenceforward scarce a day passed that she did not visit him, and each day Garth felt his strength returning. He moved about the room, helped sometimes by the woman Kate, sometimes, to his confusion and wonder, by her mistress. A couch of furs was laid for him in the window-

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space, and here, when the spring sun shone on the house, he would lie and take the air. It was a tonic to his returning vigour to watch the stream of folk pass to and fro beneath, and to hear the heavy wheels rumble on the cobbled roadway. Beyond the street to the south gleamed the river, the great shining Thames, bearing the city's traffic on its tides, and close at hand there stretched across its broad stream, shutting off his view on that side, the long line of London Bridge. He could see the nearer bridge gates from where he lay, and the backs of the jumbled buildings on the bridge itself. Merchants and men-at-arms, bare-headed 'prentice lads in their aprons, knights in gleaming armour, noisy shipmen from the vessels in the river, ladies borne daintily in litters above the miry roadway—all the daily life of the city passed beneath his eyes, and he drank in vigour as he watched them and thought eagerly of the day, soon to be expected now, when he might leave this house where he had met with so strange a generosity, this room where he had been tended as a prince, and take up again the thread of his life, broken by that lance-thrust in the darkness on the Rippiers' Track.

One morning, as Garth watched thus, the normal traffic of the street below was suddenly swept aside by a rushing throng—a fiercely shouting rabble armed with knives, axes, clubs, pikes. Thirty yards from the window they gathered about a house door. A great fellow in a leathern apron, brandishing a hammer above his head, pointed. "Here's one," cried he, and his hammer crashed on the door. A score of others followed him, shouting. There was a rending of wood, and the mob burst in. Screams of terror came from the house. Presently, from an upper window, were hurled in a horrible succession half a dozen bodies, living and dead: two men, a woman, and three children, to be battered out of recognition by the rabid creatures below. The murderers broke out again from the doorway, the smith with his reddened hammer in the van. "Death to the accursed race!" he yelled, and the mob swept on, leaving the bleeding bodies where they lay.

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Aylwin turned away, sickened, from the sight.

Some hours later the Lady Adela entered the chamber with flashing eyes and heaving breast.

"News, dear enemy! News!" she cried. "Bad news for you and your friends, but good news for me and mine!"

"Madame," said Garth, "news that makes you glad can scarcely make me sorry."

"Do you love me so much?" she laughed. "Hearken then, and we shall see! The brave Prince Edward has trapped your rebels at Northampton, has taken the castle, and given the town to sack, and Leicester's knights, assembled for conference, are prisoners every one! Young Simon, the Earl's eldest son, with his knighthood yet fresh on him, is caught with the rest. His traitor father, hurrying to relieve the besieged castle, had word of the surrender at St Albans, and has turned back, raging like a lion robbed of his whelps. They say that when the news was brought him he stood as if turned to stone, and only answered, 'It is the fortune of war. The month of May shall not pass ere my enemies have their joy turned to confusion.' Vain threat! But the old lion's heart is sore within him."

"A lion at bay is most dangerous, madame," said Garth.

"Bah!" she cried. "He is not dangerous when his head is off, as Leicester's soon will be. Meanwhile, these cursed Londoners have made a great massacre of the Jews. Their bodies strew the streets, and the gutters run with their unbelieving blood. They say two hundred have perished, and among the richest of them all Koe, the son of Abram, who not ten years since paid the King two thousand marks for his succession to his father's hoard."

Garth, who entertained all the contempt and hatred of his time for that unhappy race, found his horror of the morning's vision sensibly diminish.

"Two hundred Jews!" he repeated. "It was a cruel deed, madame, yet perhaps the land of England is well rid of two hundred usurers."

"But the King of England can ill spare their gold," said the lady.

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"It is well known that Earl Simon is no friend to the infidels," said Garth. "I have heard that in his town of Leicester no Jew is allowed to live. Yet it surprises me that a man so just should have the wretches slaughtered."

Adela laughed, scorn in her bright eyes. "You are right, brave Captain! Your noble Earl is too just to command so great a bloodshed, but, if I mistake not, too prudent not to avail himself of the proceeds. The slaughter was arranged, they say, by his trusty lieutenant, Thomas FitzThomas, our Mayor, to whose fat fingers a goodly portion of the gold will doubtless stick ere any reaches his master's treasury."

"Where is de Montfort now?" asked Garth.

"At Rochester, wearing out his strength in an attempt to reduce the castle. But that is a tough nut to crack, Captain, for the Earl Warrenne commands there for the King."

"Ah!" At that name Aylwin rose from his seat on the window couch. "And is Sir William, the Earl's son, with him there, madame?"

The lady's red lips pressed tight together for a moment. She seated herself, and looked up in his face.

"With that lost letter of yours, my dear enemy?" she asked.

"Did I rave of that too?" cried the sailor, the blood mounting to his thin face. "God! the folly of a sick man!"

"Would Captain Aylwin, then, join the Earl of Leicester at Rochester?"

"That he would!" answered Garth. "Earl Simon stands for the liberties of Englishmen!"

"And for the vengeance of Captain Aylwin," she mocked, "who waits to pay his debts to William of Warrenne."

"They shall be paid soon, dear lady," said Garth.

"I wonder," said Adela slowly and musingly. "In any case, dear enemy, they cannot be paid yet. Earl Simon is a crafty fighter, and hath with him all manner of new and cunning engines of war, to which our English are strangers. He has seized and stripped the city, and his traitor knights have plundered the churches and slain the King's men at

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the very altars, they say, but the castle walls stand firm, and de Warenne holds fast within."

"I would not have another deal Lord William his death," said Garth grimly.

The lady sat thoughtful, while her convalescent watched her frowning, wondering at the strange, hard light which came into her eyes. Presently she spoke:

"You were better to have stayed in Rye with your Rosamund. This William of Warenne may soon forget you both. And as for your letter, it can never be recovered."

"All that, madame, shall be settled when I meet Warenne."

"So fierce!" she murmured, and looking up took him by the hand and drew him to the couch. "Sit here beside me, Garth." It was the first time she had so called him by his name, and the sailor, wondering, obeyed.

"You have called yourself my servant and my debtor," said Adela, her blue eyes holding his.

"You gave me back my life, madame. What should I do but serve you?"

"Then serve me," said she, her colour deepening. "This William of Warenne was my friend."

He had not expected that, yet now his mind leaped back to what he had heard, and well-nigh forgotten, of the lady and Lord William.

"You give me a hard service, madame," he said slowly.

"I gave you first your life, Garth."

He stood up abruptly to escape her eyes, and glowered out of the window, seeing nothing of the street below, but only the mocking, dark face of young Warenne, and hearing the murmured appeal of Rosamund—"Come back before Lord William!"

Presently he turned back into the room and planted himself before Adela.

"Dear and gracious nurse, what can I say? You have me bound hand and foot! But there is the letter! The letter I must have if mortal striving can win it, for it may hold the fate of Rye and all the Ryers. If I can win it from him by other means I will not raise my hand against my enemy for your kindness' sake. And what may come of that

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forbearance I will endure as God wills. Does that content you?"

"It must, since you will yield no further," answered Adela. She gave him an odd look. "God help you, Captain Aylwin, for between love and hate I think we are in such a knot as God Himself cannot easily untangle!" And, rising swiftly, she brushed past him to the door, and was gone.

CHAPTER VII

WHOM GOD HATH JOINED

ON a bright day later, in mid-April, as Garth sat in the window embrasure watching the ships in the river, he heard the door open, and turned expectantly. It was the Lady Adela, her red-gold hair escaping round her coif, her graceful form clad in a rich robe of pale blue broided with gold.

"Be seated, dear enemy," she said, as he rose to greet her. "The bars of your prison will soon be opened, but you must gather a little more strength before I loose you."

"Ah, madame, for such a prison many who are free might sigh!"

"But not you," said she, coming to a stand before him and looking him in the face. "Yet it is time to tell you what you little guess. When I release you you must still wear my chains."

An unwonted softness in her mood surprised him. She gave him a strange smile, half fond, half pitying.

All unsuspecting he answered, "The chains of gratitude will always bind me to you, fairest madame."

"Fairest madame," she mimicked lightly, and turning from him sat down by the window. She gave him one swift side-glance, then looked into the street below. "I have called you Garth. Why cannot you call me Adela?" she asked.

"I can, but to what purpose?" he answered flushing.

"O solemn owl! Must a man have a purpose when he says a woman's name? Hath a lute-string a purpose, uttering its easy sweetness?"

From the street below came a rising murmur of voices, a hurrying of many feet. From where Garth stood, mid-way

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back into the room, watching the lady's profile, he could not see the street, and his thoughts were busy with the strange provocation of her manner.

"A man's tongue is not a lute-string," he said.

"Oh, but it can be!" And suddenly the blue eyes gleamed round on him from their preoccupation with what was passing below. "Even your own rusty Saxon tongue, dear enemy, which I have been nursing into gentle utterance, can ring mellow as a minstrel's note upon a woman's name. I have heard you call me Rosamund before to-day."

While she paused in bravado, to see what he would make of that, and Garth stood rigid, suddenly the rising murmur below burst into a tumult of shouting, a great triumphant roar which seemed to fill the city and roll away into the distance. Aylwin strode to the window, and together they looked down on the roadway, packed with a cheering throng pressing toward the bridge.

"What is it? Is London gone mad?" said Garth.

She gripped his arm, laughing a little hysterically. "It is your Earl, who brings his army back to the city at the call of his friend FitzThomas. The King and the Prince are ravaging the south. Tonbridge has fallen, and de Montfort has had to raise the siege of Rochester. The King is gone with great power toward the havens. Battle is sacked, and soon your rebellious barons will pay the price of treason. When he is ready King Henry will come hither, and when he comes, Captain, you may bless the fate that finds you in a loyal house!"

But Aylwin drew back from her hold, staring blankly at her fair face. "The Ports will fight," he exclaimed. "God, if I were but there!"

"You are better here," she said with a shrug. "It will go hard with the Ports if they resist."

"It may go hard with King Henry," he answered stubbornly. But his heart sank with a terrible foreboding for Rosamund.

"Look," said Adela. "The Barons' army is across the river."

The clamour swelled louder. From the direction of the

bridge towers trumpets blared through the shouting. Pennons caught the sunlight above the massed heads of the populace, and then the crowds parted, and in a gleaming wedge of steel a long line of armoured knights appeared, thrusting a way between the houses and the river. The shining array came on, rank upon rank of glittering spears in a dense column, men and horses cased in steel, through the welcoming throng who ran alongside, yelling themselves hoarse with shouting, tossing their caps, waving kerchiefs and banners.

The Lady Adela, kneeling on Garth's couch of furs, watched them with an appraising eye.

"A goodly array, but not enough to overturn the throne," said she. "The Earl, they say, has called for twenty thousand Londoners to march with him against the King, and the ignorant fools are flocking to his standard like sheep to the slaughterhouse. Much good they will be to withstand the shock of mailed knights!"

Aylwin stood, pale and eager, watching the iron lines.

"Madame, I must go," he announced. "I can stay here no longer like a stalled ox."

She rounded on him swiftly. "You must go? And whither?"

"To join the Earl of Leicester. I had a message for him, and will deliver it."

There was a note of mockery in her laugh. "Why, you could not march a mile!"

"I must go," he insisted.

"You must stay!" She took his hand. "I say you must stay! What can you do?"

"If Rye falls——" he began distractedly, and broke off with a groan.

"If Rye falls it will fall. Hear me now, Garth Aylwin!" The bright red lit her cheeks. Her eyes shone, and their blue was suddenly merciless. She held up her left hand before his face. "Look," said she. "Who set that ring on my finger?"

Aylwin stared at her.

Trumpets rang under the window, and the shouting of

the populace surged up as the armoured knights clanked by. "A Montfort! God save St Simon!" The sailor turned to look down again, but she dragged him back impatiently into the room.

"Answer!" she urged. "Who set that ring there?" She stood waiting, with parted lips. Garth turned away impetuously. "What is this talk of rings, madame, when Simon de Montfort rides below? God keep you, Adela of Udimore. Let me go!" Roughly he drew his hand from her, and strode toward the door.

"Stop!" she cried, with such urgency that he turned once again. "Shall a wife send her husband to his death?" she demanded. "You and I, Garth Aylwin, are man and wife!" Again she held up before him her white hand with the golden hoop on her finger.

From the white hand to her flaming face the sailor stared with a bewildered frown.

"Man and wife?" he repeated dully. "Madame, my sick wits work heavily. Interpret me your riddle: time presses."

With the shouting of the rebellious citizens in her ears, there shot through Adela's brain a searing vision of what might happen should Garth's wrath at his deception denounce her as a King's woman to the excited mob. A short cut, that, to his freedom! But she had resolved on confession, and steeled herself to go through with it.

"A riddle?" she repeated. "Is it so a Baron of Rye calls his marriage?"

"My marriage?" he echoed in amazement. "If I were married it would be a riddle indeed. A most involved conundrum!"

"And yet the simple truth," said she. "You made me your wife."

"You—my wife!" He stood back. "Woman, which of us two is mad?"

"Let us see which," she answered, and going to the door opened it and clapped her hands. Kate the serving-woman answered the summons.

"Kate," said Lady Adela, "tell Captain Aylwin here who set this ring upon my finger."

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The woman looked fearfully from one to the other. "Madame, you know well that it was this lord himself, when you were wed."

"Thunder of God!" cried Garth in sudden fury, the blood suffusing his thin face. "What damned lie is this?"

Kate stood in a tremble, her eyes upon her mistress, but Adela was watching Aylwin.

"Continue, Kate," she commanded. "Say when this befell, and where, and in whose presence."

"Madame," the woman faltered, "it was, as you know, when this lord lay wounded and like to die in the cell of Marcus the hermit on the road near Wittersham. Your squire Nicholas and myself were there in the cell when the holy hermit made you man and wife."

The angry blood left Garth's face. He felt suddenly dizzy, and leaned with his hand against the wall, lest his weakness should master him. He searched his memory, to force from it the secret of what had befallen him in this wayside cell, but could recall nothing.

"Woman, is this true?" he demanded hoarsely.

"By the Blessed Mother of God, I swear it is true, my lord."

"Will you hear the squire?" asked Adela.

Aylwin's pale face was bathed in sweat. His great seaman's hands, thin but still sinewy, clenched and unclenched convulsively, and there was a terrible look in his blue Saxon eyes, which were fastened upon the Lady of Udimore. The woman Kate, without awaiting her mistress's word, made haste to escape from those eyes.

Like a prisoner before her judge, the beautiful Adela nerved herself to meet that bleak, grey face. From the street outside the tramping and shouts continued, unnoticed now by these two.

"Wife!" His contempt seemed to spew the word out of his mouth. "Read me this devil's hotch-potch, woman!"

Adela covered her face to shut out the bleaching scorn of his eyes. He tore her hands away. "Answer!" he shouted. Adela dropped on her knees and stretched out her arms.

"Listen! I found you dying. The monk said you could

not live. The shadow of death was in your face. You raved of Rosamund. I stood beside you, and you hailed me in her name. 'Say you will wed me, sweetheart,' you said." She gulped on her words, and faltered, trembling, in her tale.

Garth, his face blazing with his wrath, grasped her round shoulders with a force that terrified her, and shook her like a raging dog. "Out with it, witch! What then?"

"Have mercy!" gasped Adela, gazing up at him wild-eyed. "I was of age. I had to wed, to inherit my father's lands, and I had to wed a noble, at my own choice. I had pledged myself to William of Warenne, who rode with the King's army, I knew not where. But that he must pass through London I knew, and I was making for London. You hailed me Rosamund in your fever, and the devil tempted me. Consider! Sir William might fall in the chances of war, or months might pass ere I could come to him. And my time was short—I must wed a noble or be buried in a convent, and my father's inheritance pass to the Abbey of Robertsbridge. You were a baron of Rye, said the devil in my ear, and you were on the point of death. Marrying you, I should win my freedom and comfort a dying man. So I bribed the monk with a rich reward, and he married us in the cell. Kate and the squire Nicholas knew what I did. Their mouths are fast shut. I brought you with me in my litter, waiting hourly for you to die. But you did not die. I could have let you die—a loosened bandage, a little neglect, and you had gone. But I tended you. Day and night I watched by you, hoping at first daily for your death, until—such fools are women—I gave up that hope, and fought death for you like a jealous mistress, binding myself every day more helplessly with the chain I had forged."

"Dear God!" Garth's nerveless hand relaxed its hold of her soft flesh. "Why did you not let me die!"

"Garth, have pity!"

He looked down with ashen face at her appealing eyes. "I pity myself," he said dully. "You had done better to let me die."

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The Lady of Udimore stood up and threw back her head with some return of pride. "A man's strength may mend a woman's folly," she said. "There is no chain so strong it cannot be broken. Break the chain and go freely forth, Garth Aylwin. None will stay you, and Rosamund waits for you." She snatched a jewelled dagger from her girdle and thrust it into his hand; then, coming close to him, she tore aside her clothes and bared her breast. "Strike!" she told him. "Once outside this house the city is on your side. Go to Leicester. Say that old Dycard's wanton niece sought to hold you from his service and you slew her. He will take you in his arms and call you patriot, and give you a good command. Strike! Why do you not strike?"

Aylwin pushed her back and stood unsteadily, dropping the dagger to the floor. "Have done with this play-acting," said he. "God helping me, strike I will, but not you, Adela." His face was twisted in an ugly grimace. "I will strike the two men who have wrought this evil, and I will strike to kill." He wiped his damp brow with his hand. "Madame my wife, since you are so, farewell," said he stonily, and moved toward the door.

Adela ran and took him by the arm, for he was staggering blindly. "Where do you go?"

"To Earl Simon."

"But you are weak as a child, and the city is in tumult!"

"You would have me wait till King Henry pacifies it, and Sir William of Warenne finds me here and hangs me for a traitor? Sweet wife, I read your thoughts! I take back the promise I gave you. Let go, woman!"

Furiously he thrust her aside, and reeled through the doorway. Through the strange house he went unsteadily, clutching here and there for support. He found the door that gave upon the street, and, fumbling with the fastening, threw it open, and among the thronging citizens, who gave way before his great gaunt figure and his ghastly face, he lurched into the street.

The steel-clad lines of knights were still passing. A tall baron on a great black war-horse rode before the house-door. His visor was raised, showing an olive-brown face, worn and

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grave, lit with coal-black eyes, darkly impenetrable, but glowing with strange fires beneath his rugged grey brows. The rider turned a moment as the crowd beside him gave passage, and his eyes met those of the haggard seaman bursting through.

“A message, Lord Simon! A message from Rye!” cried Aylwin, and staggering forward, fell his length at the black horse’s feet.

CHAPTER VIII

HOSTAGES FOR RYE

“WRITE,” said Bailiff Farr, “that owing to the unhappy, distracted condition of the realm, the fewness of men, and the great demands of the armies, we are under the necessity of asking from our friends at Bruges an increase of twenty per cent. on the price paid last year for the fleeces. Say that on the other hand the season has been good, the flocks are in good shape, and the shearing will be early. If our friends at Bruges will meet these our reasonable demands we will undertake to forward within two months next ensuing a consignment of ten thousand goodly Marsh fleeces. And say further—why, Rose, child, what ails you?”

The Bailiff interrupted the flow of careful composition to stare uncomfortably at his lovely scribe, whose tears were falling silently on the parchment before her. Rosamund brushed away the tears with her left hand and continued to write. “Ten thousand goodly Marsh fleeces. I have it written, sir.”

“Girl! Girl!” said the Bailiff reproachfully. “Must you be for ever sorrowing for that sailor-lover of yours? Keep up heart! Men like Captain Aylwin are not so easily lost.”

She threw down her quill and sighed. “Oh, Father, the time is so long—so long! Eight weeks to-day since he rode away, and since then not one word of news, either good or evil.”

The Bailiff came and laid a hand caressingly on her shoulder. “My dear, the times are evil, and we must bear them. A fellow like Aylwin, who has come unscathed through wild adventures beyond our homely imagining, both by land and sea, does not get shipwrecked on a ride from

here to London. We shall see him back, never fear, to claim his treasure—both his treasure of your bright eyes that look for him daily and that other treasure which lies hid in our cellars for safety, instead of rocking unsteadily in the *Royal Richard*."

"If we but knew that Earl Simon had your letter, Father! But there is no word."

"And how should we get word, with the King's army ravaging Sussex?"

"If Garth is dead, Father, my heart will die too."

"God give us better fortune!" said Farr. "That is foolish talk of yours, Rose. Were Aylwin indeed dead it were a sore blow, but, even so, life is for the living, and there is many a stout fellow would kindle at a smile from you."

"Fire does not light from ashes," answered Rosamund.

"Look you, child," said the Bailiff, "when your mother died—the saints have her in keeping!—the world was very dark for me, for I loved her well, and we had been together twenty years. But the day's work is to do. You are young, and love knocks many times at the door of youth. So dry your eyes, my sweet, and give these Flemings my message, for the ship waits, and the tide is on the turn."

But the Bailiff's letter was destined to miss the tide, for while he dictated his next careful sentence there came a knock at the door, and a servant entered hastily, ushering in one of the jurats, who doffed his hat at sight of the Bailiff's daughter.

His face was grave. "Hast heard the news, Master Farr?" said he.

Rosamund sprang to her feet, eyes bright with anticipation. Her hand, on the parchment she had been writing, trembled a little.

"The King is at Winchelsea with a great force," the jurat said. "He calls on the Ports to send ships and men at once to attack London from the Thames."

Roger Farr's broad, grizzled face set hard. "And what say our brothers of Winchelsea to that?" he asked.

"They have given a flat refusal, both for themselves and the whole Brotherhood of the Ports."

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"They go beyond their rights to commit the Brotherhood," said the Bailiff. "Nevertheless, they are brave men, and God preserve them from the King's wrath!"

"Men say the King is beside himself with fury, yet for the moment he holds his hand. He is dispatching messengers forthwith to Rye and the other Ports to learn their answer. Bailiff, what shall our answer be now?"

Farr drew himself up. He was not a tall man, but he seemed to grow in dignity.

"We of Rye have pledged faith to the Earl of Leicester. We keep faith with Lord Simon and the Ports. Let the jurats be called together here at once, that our answer may be prepared."

As soon as his colleagues had departed the Bailiff strode to the window and stood looking out over the estuary to where the low houses of old Winchelsea showed on the flats. His brow was lined with anxious thought, and for a time he seemed not to notice the hand which his daughter laid affectionately on his shoulder.

Rosamund was pale, but her tears were dry.

She had her father's pride in the Port which he virtually ruled, and a crisis such as this threatened to be was no time for the indulgence of private griefs. As the old man did not speak, but continued to stand gazing, the trouble ever deeper on his forehead, she took his hand.

"Father—what will it mean?"

"Child, if I knew that I should be a wise man! The time comes to every man when he must make his choice. We made ours when we sent Aylwin to Earl Simon. The ships shall not sail! But it is flat rebellion. We may close the gates against the King, but that is to invite reprisals, and if the King is in force we are ill-fitted to withstand a siege from landward, however stout a front we may show our enemies from the sea. Observe, moreover, that our brethren of Winchelsea have refused their ships, yet Winchelsea does not burn." He pointed with a grim smile across the sunlit water.

"Was it not rumoured that Lord Simon had left London, marching southward to meet the King?"

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"Therein lies our hope, child. With the sea-road open behind him for reinforcement or escape, the King, in my opinion, dare not risk a rising of the Ports against him, and for the safety of the realm he dare not destroy us. We must admit his messengers and hear them, and I myself must answer for Rye. It may be he will want my old head, but, by God, the ships he shall not have! The council shall give the word, and not a captain in the Port shall sail. Heaven save Lord Simon and the liberties of England!"

Within an hour the jurats in their robes sat in anxious council in the Bailiff's hall. The talk was grave, but on the main issue there was perfect unanimity. No Rye ships should leave the Channel for the Thames.

The council was still sitting, and Rosamund, in a little room off the main hall, was listening to the murmur of voices that came through the closed door, when a sudden confused noise made her start from her seat by the window, clutching her hands to her breast. A jangle of metal and the sound of heavy footsteps rang in the hall, and the murmuring citizen voices were suddenly still.

Swiftly crossing the little room, she set the door ajar. Between it and the hall ran a short passageway, across the end of which a curtain was hung. Drawing aside by ever so little the folds of the curtain, the girl peered into the hall.

A score or more of spearmen had made a ring about the council table, where the Bailiff and his jurats sat, pale in their scarlet robes. Even as she looked her father rose sternly from his place.

"Sirs!" he challenged boldly, and Rosamund's heart leaped to hear his brave voice. "What means this insult to the barons of Rye?"

The next moment terror seized her, for at the tail of the spearmen there strode, fully armed, into the hall, his sword naked in his hand, and the spurs on his iron heels clanking as he walked, the young knight William of Warenne. The visor of his helmet was up, and through the bars his handsome dark face wore a look of haughty triumph. He crossed the floor, and, standing a moment in contemptuous salute before the jurats, laid a scroll on the table in their midst.

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"Greetings, barons and freemen of Rye!" said he. "Our lord the King commands me to require your instant service as set out in this his message. Will it please you read?"

Roger Farr, still standing, faced the knight gravely.

"Young man," said he, "as touching our lord the King, it is his right to send us messages by whatsoever hand he chooses, and we owe him our humble duty. But, as touching his messenger, I would have you know that we barons of Rye are very jealous of our dignity. Our gates stand open, as ever, to the King's service. But this is my house, Sir William de Warenne, and were you ten times the King's messenger, you do wrong to insult me thus. Withdraw your men out of my house."

The knight impatiently tapped the scroll on the table with the point of his sword.

"Come, Bailiff, waste no words. Read the King's message quickly, and give me answer, all of you."

"Our lord the King," said the Bailiff slowly, "is known to all men for a valiant and courteous knight. I will never believe he ordered a message to be so delivered to peaceful men."

"Peaceful men!" William laughed scornfully. "There are none such in England, Bailiff. There are those that stand for the King and those who are for his enemies. Read, and let us see on which side stand your barons of Rye."

"My lord," said Farr stubbornly, "you have brought armed force into the house of a free man, as honourable as yourself. Murder us if you will—the Ports will avenge us dearly. But the Bailiff of Rye will read no message, nor answer any, that is held on a sword's point. And so you may tell our lord the King if you will."

Rosamund saw the dark eyes flash angrily behind the helmet bars, and trembled for her father. But Sir William suddenly laughed.

"I have heard ere now of Bailiffs of the Ports who could not read," said he tauntingly. "Since you will not read the message, I will read it for you." He thrust his sword back into the scabbard, drew off his steel gauntlets, and unrolled the scroll. "Our lord King Henry," said he, "calls on his

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Port of Rye, and his valiant and loyal barons and freemen thereof, forthwith to fit out the full number of their ships as set out in their charters granted by himself and his predecessors, and to sail at once with the rest of the Navy of the Ports to the river Thames, there to attack the rebellious citizens of London. What answer do I take back to the King, Bailiff?"

Roger Farr had resumed his seat. His fellow jurats, with pale but resolute faces, hung on his answer. He stood up again, breathing hard.

"The Navy of the Ports is for use against the King's enemies and not against the King's servants."

"Ha! Do you say they shall not go?"

"The barons and freemen of Rye say they shall not go. If any man says otherwise, let him speak!" He glanced round the table. The sweat stood on his brow, and he was deathly pale. The jurats sat silent.

"So you refuse your ships, rebels of Rye?" The young noble looked round the red-robed circle, but not a man spoke.

"Dog of a merchant!" cried the fierce young knight. "One day you shall hang, and we will cleanse these Ports of yours from treason. But in the meantime our lord the King will take hostages for the behaviour of your Port. One in three of you shall come with me, and, as for the rest, we will have their sons. Our dungeons at Lewes have ample space. Up with you, barons and freemen. I have a hundred spears with me, and time presses."

"I am ready," said old Roger calmly, throwing off his jurat's robe and squaring his shoulders.

This was more than Rosamund could bear. At sight of her father stepping slowly out toward the spearmen, while his fellow-jurats rose in dismay, she drew aside the curtain and ran forward with a cry.

The men-at-arms made way for the girlish figure, and with high colour and flashing eyes she stood before their leader.

The knight's face lit at sight of her beauty, her bosom heaving, her graceful form draped with the rich red samite of her clinging cotte. About her neck she wore, as ever, the pearl necklace, her absent lover's gift.

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"Lord William," she pleaded, laying a hand on his mailed arm, "hear me for my father and my friends!"

"What shall I hear, pretty one?" asked the knight. "Treason is too ugly a matter to be spoken of by such lips as yours." His light words, and his eyes dwelling on her greedily, struck terror to her heart, but Rosamund persisted.

"My lord, your father's house is of the greatest in the land. Your father's son should not be deaf to the pleas of justice. We Ryers are peaceful folk, who take no part in the quarrels which rend the realm. We of the Ports are set here to guard with our ships the sea-gates of England, and that we will do with our lives and all we have. But to send away our ships to make war upon the good men of London is to leave open the gates of this realm to every foreign foe who may think fit to profit by the troubles of the land. It is to betray our trust to our lord the King. It is said Earl Simon leads a great army southward. How if the King's host be overthrown and the King's lords forced to seek refuge? If these Ports of ours are empty of his ships, how shall the King escape?"

Sir William smiled behind his visor bars. "Acutely argued, by my faith! And yet it is a woman's argument, for it avoids the point at issue, which is that your father and his friends in their exceeding care for the King's person have taken on themselves to refuse the King's commands. And that is treason, pretty one—stark, black treason."

"And even if it be," pleaded Rosamund with spirit, "consider well if it be wise statecraft thus to set by the ears every free baron of the Ports by making a mock of their nobility. Our lord the King is not so strong that he can lightly make foes of those who should be his friends. Consider well, my lord, and remember you deal not with churls and weaklings, but with men whose rank and privilege give way to none."

"Most lovely advocate, I will consider gravely, and though by the strict letter of my orders I should take the Bailiff here as my chief hostage for his town's behaviour, yet it shall never be said Sir William de Warenne was deaf to the prayers of beauty. Therefore the Bailiff shall stay to rule his Port and

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remember the King's interest, and I will take with me his daughter to enliven our dull towers and walls of Lewes."

Roger Farr gazed wildly round at the grinning spearmen and the frightened faces of his jurats. There was no help, and he knew it.

"Sir Knight," said he, his sturdy pride broken, "I will come with you, and I will enrich you with such treasure as even your father's son cannot despise. But leave my daughter, in the name of God and His mercy!"

The triumphant young noble turned haughtily on him. "Old man, it may be that I will take both your daughter and your treasure. And as for God and His mercy, you may thank them if you do not lose your head also. The King is well served in Sussex, Bailiff. There was a letter, bethink you, which went from your house to that damned traitor de Montfort, signed by your own hand, assuring him craftily of your Port's aid in his accursed treason. That letter, Bailiff, I took myself from the body of your messenger."

A cry rang through the hall. Rosamund, wild-eyed, clutched her father's arm.

"Is Captain Aylwin dead?" asked Farr, in a shaken voice.

"Unless it has pleased heaven to work a miracle in his honour he is certainly dead. Yet for what comfort it may give this pretty maid, I will say I did not see him die. I left him in care of a holy hermit to keep against my return for the hanging meet for so naughty a rebel. When I came again the hermit's cell was empty—the good man, failing to restore his patient, must have taken fright and fled. Come, sweetheart, it was my last promise to this Aylwin that I would get you to my father's castle and hold you safe there during these troubled times."

His taunting eyes smiled upon the girl, and he took a step toward her. Rosamund, with parted lips, watched him like one fascinated. With the conviction of her lover's death, something had given way in her. As William took another step, with cat-like swiftness she snatched a dagger from his belt and struck furiously at him. His mailed arm, swinging up on the instant, parried the stroke from his bared

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throat, but the dagger touched his cheek with a glancing blow, and the red blood flowed. Next moment he had crushed the girl's arms to her sides in an iron grip, and the spearmen, rushing forward, tore the struggling Bailiff from beside her. The other jurats shrank back, appalled, from the soldiers' thirsty steel.

"Lord," said a man-at-arms, "shall we slit the throats of these burgher swine and have done?"

"Thunder of God, no!" shouted William. "Take this spitfire, two of you, and hold her fast." He dashed the blood from his cheek. "The rest of you take every third man of the red-cloaked traitors, and let the remainder go home. Send men with each to his house, and bring me back his son, or his daughter if he has a fair one. Turn loose the Bailiff with the rest."

To resist, when all power lay with the strong hand, was worse than useless. Within half an hour the cavalcade of knights and men-at-arms rode clattering through the steep, cobbled streets, sullenly watched from under the heavily timbered house-fronts by groups of helpless townfolk, who muttered bitter, impotent curses as they passed. Each hostage—jurat, youth, or maid—rode with a rope about the middle, made fast at its other end to the saddle-bow of a spearman. At the head of the line rode the hawk-faced young Warrenne, with Rosamund in his charge. She rode as though unseeing through the town where she had queened it, a pale vision of pride and grief, her burning eyes staring straight before her, her ears deaf to the murmurs of pity that rose on every hand. As they rode under the shadow of the great towers of the Landgate she did not turn. Her lover's fate, her father's grief, her townsmen's humiliation, her own deadly peril, made in her heart one despairing resolve—to kill her lover's slayer.

A saying of Garth's came back to her as they rode out into the flowering countryside—that a man who set no value on his life could be stopped from his purpose only by death. Death had stopped her too daring sailor, but the man who had slain him desired her for himself, and her hour, though she bought it with her life, would come.

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De Warenne leaned to her from his saddle, his eyes gloating over her pale beauty.

"Rosamund, I will be gentler with you than you think. But you must learn to love me well, my flower of Rye. Oh, you shall walk in jewels and cloth of gold!" He leaned still closer. "I will teach you sweet lessons, Rosamund," said Sir William.

Hysterical laughter broke from her suddenly. Her clear young voice rang out in a song which English folk in those days had made to the honour of their great champion.

"Il est apelé de Montfort !
Il est el Mond, et si est fort,
Si a grand chevalerie
Je vois et je m'acort.
Il eime dreit, et het le tort,
Si avera la mestrie !"

The notes rang with a mad defiance over the jangling arms and the beating hoofs. The startled Royalists exchanged glances, and the captives raised their heads to listen.

William straightened in his saddle, and smiled with masterful contempt.

"A pretty song, and right well sung, sweetheart. You shall sing it in my father's hall at Lewes. But trust not overmuch to your knight of the Strong Mount, for he and his rebel barons will presently be laid as flat as these marshes. And then such as have written him treasonable letters may well rejoice if a fair daughter in kind hands may buy them clemency!"

CHAPTER IX

THE EMBASSY TO LEWES

INTO the deep woods round Little Fletching streamed the gay May sunbeams, gladdening the hearts of the birds, which sang their welcome in every tree, warming the gloom of mysterious thickets, dancing in the leafy glades on an embroidery of spring flowers that spangled the forest floor.

There were strangers in the forest. For three days past the woodland creatures had scampered before their approach as they went pouring southward: a great flood of men and horses, moving with clank of armour and creak of baggage-train along the byways of the Weald. Now, scattered over a long mile of woodland tracks, they lay encamped in the heart of the forest, waiting. Waiting in a grim patience on some unknown fate which hid behind the sunshine. The blue wood-smoke curled up into the tree-tops from the camp-fires before their tents; great war-horses in hundreds stood tethered in the more open spaces; and everywhere throughout the woods the sunshine gleamed back from innumerable surfaces of steel. Sixty thousand men waited for life or death in Fletching Forest.

Garth Aylwin, sprawling his length at his tent entrance, on the dry moss of the forest floor, frowned gloomily into the green depths. To him and a few other Sussex men had been due the guidance of this motley host of knights and spearmen, archers and citizens, through the devious ways of the Weald. Skilfully and well they had performed their task, avoiding the treacherous swamps, recruiting the scanty resources of the country as they came through, and travelling all the time so secretly that, though the wilds they traversed were fiefs of the King's lords, their whereabouts

were still unknown to the King's army, which lay massed nine miles away at Lewes. Southward there, under the sun, where the Earl Warenne's feudal town nestled in the gap of the hills, and his great fortress, with its double keep, held the pass of the winding Ouse, King Henry and his fiery son had joined forces, and awaited the coming of their rebellious barons. And whether the outcome would be carnage or peace no man yet knew, though in that host hidden in the forest were many who prayed for peace.

The weeks that had passed since Garth had pushed through the London crowd to fall fainting under the horse-hoofs of the Barons' great leader had given him back his bodily strength, but his soul was sick with hate and the sense of wrong. Each day that he lived with the cruel mockery of that marriage before his mind made him rage with bitter impotence. He no longer blamed too angrily the wife whom he had left: his sense of justice and even some faint sentiment of gratitude acquitted her, yet the recollection of her beguiling beauty and of the foul trickery of Fate tormented him with a fury of resentment. Dwelling ever on the thought of Rosamund, he cursed the fraud which had snatched her from him.

Through the blackness of this cloud that had loomed over his future there gleamed a single ray of hope. To that hope he held with obstinacy, refusing, even while he recognized the desperate nature of the refusal, to surrender to the coil which circumstances had spun about him. If he came with his life through this great storm of war into which he had thrown himself his course was mapped, and every passing day confirmed his resolve to pursue it. First he would hunt down William de Warenne, though he traversed England to find him, and kill him. Thereby he would both achieve a righteous vengeance and guard his Rose from being plucked from her southern garden. Moreover, with William dead, the danger of that compromising letter would be less, and the old Bailiff's head would sit somewhat more safely on his shoulders. Garth's mind was made up that young de Warenne once slain, he would somehow lay hands on that cursed priest Marcus, and hale him in the *Royal Richard*

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to Rome, and there seek from the Holy Father of Christendom a declaration that his marriage was falsely procured, and void.

Brooding daily over his plan, Garth realized to the full its hazards, but cherished it jealously. At least, he told himself, he had treasure, which should ease his way. He could offer such terms as even the Holy See might scarcely disdain, though from the hands of one who had outraged the Papal messenger. He would have to humble himself, but there was no penance he would not do for Rosamund. Holy Church should have no cause to complain of the abjectness of his submission, let her only release him from his present bonds.

But how if after all she would not! Aylwin, stretched on the warm moss, pursued his desperate day-dream to the very steps of the Vatican, and envisaged the possibility of ultimate failure. The blood surged fiercely in him, and his eyes, staring unseeingly into the thickets, blazed at that thought with a dangerous, passionate fire.

"What see you there in the brambles, Captain? By the Rood! you might be communing with the devil!"

Aylwin started from his reverie and sprang erect. The sense of the spoken words reached his understanding slowly, but he became aware of a rider halted between him and the sun. The fury passed from his eyes, and the rider sat watching him with an odd smile—a young knight, whose fair clipped hair showed under his helmet edge, and whose shield bore a device of wavy lines of silver on a blue field. He had a handsome, boyish face.

"And if I commune with the devil, what then, Sir William de Blund?"

"Why, then, my apologies to his devilship, but I must interrupt your parley," said the knight. "It has pleased our noble Earl Simon to appoint you to a perilous honour, valiant Captain, and I am to command your instant attendance at his pavilion."

"I am ready." Aylwin picked up his sword from the ground beside him, and did on his belt. "What is this duty?"

"You will need your horse, my friend. We are to go to Lewes, and the Earl of Leicester thinks so well of your guidance that he entrusts you with finding the way through this bewilderment of trees."

Garth fetched his horse and set the saddle on him. "Why do we go to Lewes?" he demanded.

"It is an embassy, Aylwin. The Earl would fain avoid, if avoided it may be with honour, the fatal test of battle with the King. More I cannot tell you, save that he sends as ambassadors the Bishops of London and Worcester, and ourselves with a score of lances for their escort. Will you not put on armour? The King's archers may be careless with their shafts."

"I have a ring-shirt in my tent. Other armour I cannot wear," said Garth. He went into the tent and put the armour on under his green coat of a forester. It was a light shirt of Spanish ring-mail, which had been brought to him in London, three days after he had been accepted for the army of Earl Simon. Garth never saw the messenger who brought it, but well he knew there was but one in London who could have sent it. It was a piece of marvellous lightness, a triumph of the armourer's craft, and must have cost a great sum.

He mounted and followed the gay young knight along the forest-paths to a large clearing, in the midst of which were pitched the pavilions of the principal leaders of the Barons' army, and round the edges of which, in the shade of the trees, their horses were tethered. They rode up to a great blue tent, over which, limp in the windless air, hung the banner of Simon de Montfort, a huge white lion with a double tail rampant on a scarlet field.

A soldier at the tent door saluted de Blund, and, calling another to hold their horses as they dismounted, ushered them within.

The greatest general of that age in Christendom sat alone in his tent, bent over the scroll of a rude map, which was held open on the table before him by the weight of his great sword and scabbard. On a bench beside him lay his black helmet and the heavier pieces of his harness.

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As the two men stood stiffly within the entrance of the tent Earl Simon rose courteously, a splendid, towering figure of a man, soberly dressed, but richly, as became the brother-in-law of the King. The darkly burning eyes considered them from beneath his grizzled brows.

"You are diligent, William. Captain Aylwin, you have made good your claim to know this wild country of yours. Methinks, too, the air of your native wilderness has put vigour into your blood. You are twice the man you were when last we spoke together."

Garth Aylwin, with the lawless freedom of the seas in his blood, did not readily yield allegiance, but he had come by now to set this man on a pedestal. "I thank God, lord Earl," said he, "that I am fit for any service it may please you to appoint me."

"The army is your debtor, Captain, and to pay the debt will lay on you a further duty. Know you John of Warenne's town of Lewes?"

"Very well, my lord."

"Can you guide a party thither, quickly and secretly?"

"Aye."

"Good. Our lord the King lies at the Priory of St Pancras there, guest of the Prior William of Neville." The Earl's sun-browned, austere face set sternly at that name.

"A thrice-damned villain, Churchman though he be!" cried de Blund hotly. "But for his black treachery we had held Northampton, and been spared that bloody massacre of gallant knights. By the Saviour's wounds, had I my way, I would raze that convent of cursed Cluniacs at Northampton so that not one stone should stand upon another!"

"William, blaspheme not!" said de Montfort sternly "The ways of God are hid from men."

"Your pardon, my lord Earl," said the young knight, abashed. "But I was at Northampton, in that welter of fire and blood, and when I think of that shaven dog, advanced for his treachery to the fat Priory of Lewes, and raising the towers of his new church with the plunder of my slaughtered comrades, my blood cries out in my veins."

"God's justice waits," answered de Montfort, "but it

hath a long arm, William. Captain Aylwin, I send messengers to the King at Lewes. You will conduct them thither, and await their return with the King's reply. Both going and coming you will take precaution lest your steps be tracked by spies. And I pray God in His mercy so to incline the heart of our lord the King that the evil of further bloodshed may be averted from this troubled land."

"Lord Earl," said Garth, "I will do what a man may. If it please you, may I ask one thing?"

"What is that?"

"I would gladly know if there is any tidings from my town of Rye."

"Only this, Captain. The Ryers and the other Portsmen have kept their faith with me. No ship from the Navy of the Ports hath entered Thames."

"Lord, I am proud to hear that news," said Garth. "Yet I fear that faith may cost a dreadful price."

"That, with much else, lieth in God's hands. Yet there is no price too high to pay for loyalty. Stay, Aylwin; I can tell you one thing more."

"My lord?"

Leicester took a stride nearer, and, tall as was Garth, he had to look upward to meet the burning eyes. "William of Warenne is with the King," said the Earl.

Aylwin started, and stood more stiffly.

"I tell you this news from my spies, because you have told me your story. And I bid you remember that we in this army of the Barons of England are as Crusaders." Gravely with his fingers he made the sign of the Cross on the young seaman's breast. "We fight, if fight we must, to establish justice and freedom in this realm, and for no private quarrel. If you meet your enemy in battle, strike, and God prosper your sword, but if you set private hate before the nation's weal you are no soldier of England's. Therefore remember when you come to Lewes."

And Aylwin, all unsuspecting the ordeal that lay before him, answered readily, "Lord Earl, I will remember."

The afternoon was well advanced before they left the camp and made their way by narrow forest-tracks toward

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the town. In front rode Garth and de Blund, the latter bearing a white pennon at his lance's end. Followed the escort in two groups, with the Bishops between them on white mules, each Churchman wearing the cope and mitre of his high office, and accompanied by a chaplain bearing his pastoral staff.

The sky was reddening to the sunset ere the party came out from the woodlands and began to descend the slope of the hills toward the stronghold, behind whose grim walls, crowned by their two high keeps, the de Warennes lorded it over their feudal burg. Above the lofty southern keep the evening breeze from seaward flapped the blue and gold banner of their proud house.

"The King keeps but indifferent sentinels about his host," said de Blund, as the embassy descended the turf slopes toward the camp-fires reddening in the twilight. "No man would approach thus unchallenged where our Earl was in command. Ha! they see us at last!"

A trumpet sounded behind the barricade of stakes and earth which made an outwork on the northern face of the town, and through an opening gate a troop of horse came riding. Their leader halted, and de Blund declared his errand.

The Royalist knight smiled under his open visor, and bent low in his saddle in salutation to the prelates.

"Reverend and noble sirs, the King and his lords sit at meat in the great hall of the Priory. Will it please you beard him at the banquet table, or will you wait for the morrow?"

"My son," answered in a mild voice Walter de Cantelupe, the kindly, wise old Bishop of Worcester, "to-morrow is a day that never comes. The noble Earl of Leicester hath committed to us a weighty message for our lord the King, which we do earnestly desire to deliver without delay, seeing that the lives of many brave men hang on the answer. Pray you, let us be taken at once before the King."

The knight bowed low again before the old man, whose father had been steward to the King and the King's father before him, and who had himself been an active and zealous friend to the liberties of Church and State.

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"As you will, my lords. I will see if the King will hear you. Follow me." He turned his horse, and the two bands moved on together to the town.

"De Blund," said the Royalist when they came to the camp, "your archers must await you here, where our fellows shall entertain them as best they can, for this is a lean land. Yourself and your squire and these reverend lords shall come with me to the Priory. The black monks, de Blund, are overjoyed to have the King and the Prince within their walls. You will find them an order of easy living.

*"Mais ils le font pur compaignie,
Et ne mie pur glotonie."*

He laughed as he hummed the satirical song of the day.

In the deepening twilight the little band rode through the narrow timbered streets of the feudal town, filled with a tumult of men and horses coming and going, and so came to the flat, grassy lands by the Ouse, outside the southern walls, where the great Priory of St Pancras stood within a vast enclosure of wall of its own. Outside its walls the blaze of many camp-fires reddened the sky. On silken pavilion and ruder tent fluttered the pennons of their martial occupants, and from within came sounds of laughter and feasting. In the shadow cast by great trees around the Priory enclosure hundreds of horses were tethered.

The great gate of the Priory stood wide open, sentinelled by horsemen and archers, on whose arms the leaping light from braziers on either side of the gateway flickered and danced. There was no lack of traffic through the gate—soldiers and serving-men, monks and minstrels, and women too passed freely in and out. The newcomers were halted, however, and turned over to the care of a guard within the gate-house, while the knight who had conducted them went on to announce their coming.

He was gone some time. Meanwhile, food and wine were set before the embassy, and after partaking thereof Aylwin, leaving de Blund in converse with the Bishops, stood idly in the doorway, watching the human tide flow back and forth under the flaming braziers.

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“Save you, Captain Aylwin!”

Garth started at the voice. A rider had stopped in front of him and was looking down with an expression half roguish, half defiant. The fellow's face under his leathern soldier's cap was wizened and brown, yet youthful and alive.

“Diccon Lightfoot!” cried Garth. “In Lewes, and not on the *Royal Richard*! How in the fiend's name come you here?”

“Captain,” answered the fellow, “I might say the same to your honour, though with greater respect.” He dismounted clumsily enough, sailor-like, and stood beside Aylwin. “God never built me for a horseman,” he grumbled. “Stand still, thou hoofed abomination.”

“How come you here?” asked Aylwin again.

“Marry, willy-nilly, valiant Captain! And by the True Cross, of which we have both seen fragments enough to build a ship, I will stay no longer than I am forced, for a wooden deck under a man's feet is better than these uneasy cattle bumping his nether parts. If you must know, the *Royal Richard* lay in the river awaiting you for many days, and the men grew greedy for their share of the spoil. Then one morning comes Master Farr the Bailiff with a long face, and with the help of your poor Diccon deals out to every man his due, very justly, and every man well content. So, leaving Master Farr to take charge of the ship on your behalf, as he showed authority to do, we your faithful friends dispersed to enjoy the fruits of our labour. Then in an unlucky moment I called to mind a black-haired maid of Winchelsea who had been kind to me of old, and bethought me to pay her a visit. So, taking with me a portion of my savings to commend me to her favourable consideration, I got a fellow to put me over the river, and was trudging cheerfully for the Port, when whom should I meet by the way but some rascal archers of the Earl Warenne. ‘Halt!’ said they, and as they were ten to one I halted. ‘Your purse, dog!’ said they. ‘How should a poor sailor have a purse?’ says I. But I might have spared my breath, for they relieved me of all I had on me. Then I grew reckless at sight of spoil so hardly won from the heathen stolen from me within a step

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of home by my own countrymen, and I reviled them for the pestilent thieves they were. So they made a ring round me, and their leader, hailing me Sir Spitfire, gave me the choice of joining their service or being run through the body there and then with a pike. So, seeing I must make the best of them, or they would make the worst of me, I joined them, and here I am. But tell me the *Royal Richard* is for sea, and the fiend take me if I do not find a way to give them the slip, Captain."

"Be sure the *Royal Richard* shall sail again, and that on a long adventure, Dick, when these troubles are ended. But for the present I have vowed service in a high cause, and must perform it out. Diccon, is there news of Rye?"

The sailor-soldier gave his captain an odd look, and hesitated.

"Out with it, man!" cried Garth, with a lightning look.

"Why, sir, I am not the only Ryer here," said Lightfoot warily.

"The town has been sacked! God, man—why dost thou not speak!"

"The town is well enough, Captain. But—the King hath taken hostages for its behaviour."

"Not the Bailiff? Not old Roger Farr?"

"Not him, sir. But, among others, Mistress Rosamund, his daughter."

The blood ran back from Aylwin's face as he gripped the doorpost and glared upon the man.

"Mistress Rosamund here, in Lewes? Dick, thou'rt mad!"

"Indeed, sir, she is here, for I have seen her, and she me. Lord William brought her, and with her some jurats and some jurats' sons. They say she is at the feast yonder in the hall to-night, but whether that be true or not I know not. Captain! Captain!"

The scared whisper of the man steadied the sea-rover. He glanced back over his shoulder into the guard-room. His wits worked with swift decision, and his blue eyes glittered. Diccon Lightfoot, watching him, recalled moments of stark peril when the *Royal Richard* fought the tempest for her

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life, moments of desperate battle southward among the Moors, when catastrophe hung by a thread. He had seen the same frozen glitter in his captain's eyes before, and it gave him a queer thrill.

Since they had passed the gateway and the guard, there was no close watch set upon Earl Simon's messengers. Garth stepped out from his doorway with seeming carelessness beside his old shipmate, motioning Lightfoot to lead his horse. Thus they drew away from the illumination of the torches.

"Diccon," said Garth harshly, "thou'rt on the wrong side of this warfare, fighting against the liberties of England, and traitor to our town of Rye."

"I know it, Captain, but show me how to avoid it."

"Am I still thy captain? Make choice quickly. Acknowledge or deny me."

"You are my captain, sir, and I am your man."

"I will remember it, Dick. Look now, our coats are none so different. Get me to this banquet hall among the men-at-arms, among the serving-men—anywhere, I care not, so I get there. And, having got me there, leave me, and go to Sir William de Blund and say my service is Earl Simon's, but my life is my own and my lady's. If the dawn finds me not with him on the forest road we trod this day I shall be dead. Let him then take back the Bishops by the way I showed him, and God prosper the Earl of Leicester and all that march with him. Wilt thou do this, Dick?"

"Why, Captain, I will do my best, and it should not be so hard. The King's great lords, who feast with him nightly in the Priory here, come from far and nigh, and no man knows his neighbour or his neighbour's man. There is Fulk FitzWarren, the pirate's son from the Welsh Marches, and John Balliol, lord of Galloway, and Robert the Bruce of Annandale, with many another northern lord. From the four corners of the kingdom the great vassals are come, with folk whose very speech a plain man may hardly follow, men wildly clothed and strangely armed. While the King feasts in the hall with his lords their squires and attendants make a confusion about the Priory with as many tongues as the

House of Babel. I myself, sir, bear a message from the castle for the Earl Warenne—a message which will be little satisfaction for its bearer, for it tells that his lordship's favourite jester, that was to have made entertainment for the company, is fallen grievously sick of a sudden fever."

"Give me thy message!" ordered Garth quickly. "It shall be my passport."

"Will you pass yourself for a man of the Earl's? God save you, Captain—that were inviting death with both hands! The Earl is a terrible man!"

"Give me the message!" Aylwin insisted. "And if you would still be my loyal man, Diccon, get you straightway to Sir William de Blund, and say as I have bid you. Then get you out of Lewes to the Earl of Leicester's army, and if need be give your service for mine. But if God prospers me to-night you shall not need to go so far, for I will send you back to Rye with the Bailiff's daughter."

"That were indeed a merry journey," said Lightfoot, as Garth stood frowning on him in the moonlight. "But, Captain, Captain, you go to your death. Neither you nor any man can snatch the Lady Rosamund from the claws of these hawks of Warenne. Sir William's madness for her is the talk of his father's castle. And to-night——" He caught his captain's eye, and hesitated.

"To-night, Diccon?" echoed Aylwin stonily. "God's curse pursue thee, Dick, if thou hide anything of this business from me. Thou knowest more!"

"Captain, indeed I know nothing of a certainty, except that they say she hath bewitched him, captive though she be, and even in that nest of hawks still keeps him at bay. One day she gives him soft words and promising smiles, and the next, when he seeks fulfilment, she puts on armour of ice, and whips him with taunts."

"Dick, is this truth?"

"So it is said, Captain. And though he threatens and storms, and she is utterly in his power, they say he desires her love so greatly that he shrinks before her scorn. His kin make secret mock of him, but none dare do so openly, for Lord William is a grim man with a sword. But to-night he

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hath made her come with him to the King's feasting for the first time. And there are wagers in the castle——" He stopped again.

"There are wagers, you were saying, Diccon?" came his captain's stony echo.

"Why, sir, the wine flows freely in the Priory halls. There are women prisoners too, both high and low. You have seen cities sacked, Captain. Things are done in the Priory on nights of feasting that might call down fire from heaven."

"Give me thy message and begone!" commanded Garth.

Diccon drew out a little scroll and handed it to his leader. Without another word Aylwin left him, and ran with long strides toward the main Priory buildings, where from many a traceried window the festive rays shone out into the night.

CHAPTER X

THE FEAST AT THE PRIORY

As Garth drew near the doors he stopped running and went more circumspectly, finding, however, as Lightfoot had promised, so great and varied a company about the place that he went unchallenged among the lanterns and torches, and, once inside, mixed unquestioned with those that came and went. Avoiding the approach to the refectory itself, where an avenue of men-at-arms kept a passage clear for the greater folk, he lost himself in a maze of stone-flagged passages where retainers of the lesser sort awaited the pleasure of their lords and the Priory servants passed to and fro in the service of the feast. Presently, finding himself in the neighbourhood of the kitchens, he marked a table-server in blazoned livery hurrying past, and, seizing the man unceremoniously by his velvet sleeve, swung him round.

"Fellow," said he, "I bring an urgent message for my noble master, the Earl Warrene, from his lady at the castle. Bring me where I may conveniently deliver it."

The expensive menial, accosted thus by one who seemed a common man-at-arms, was on the point of a pert answer, but something in Aylwin's grim look gave him pause.

"The noble Earl," said he severely, "sitteth deep in talk on the right hand of the King's Majesty. Therefore the message must wait. Why came you not in by the door yonder, soldier?"

"Fool!" said Aylwin. "Shall I carry evil news to my master up this great hall with every eye upon me?"

"Is your news then so evil?" A scared look came to the servitor's fat face. "Doth the Earl of Leicester menace us?" he whispered. "I have heard he is near."

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"I have heard so too," said Garth. "For all I know he may be at the barbican, but it is no concern of mine. I am to let my master know that his favourite jester, Michael, is suddenly sick to death, and may not appear at the feast."

"So!" exclaimed the man, his fear dissolving in a mischievous grin. "Then, soldier, you have my pity. It was in my mind to take your message myself, who am more suitably apparelled to stand before princes. But devil take me if I face de Warenne with such tidings!"

"If the Earl of Leicester's strength be as men say," said Garth, "de Warenne will have more use for a stout soldier than a sick jester. Set me where I may watch my opportunity."

"The merry Michael dying—it is an evil omen!" muttered the man. "My lord the Prior will be mightily afflicted. This Michael hath many a time caused his reverend ribs to ache. A very evil omen!"

"The fiend take your Prior and his fat ribs!" exclaimed Garth impatiently. "If you do not speedily bring me into the hall there will be more ribs than his to ache!"

"Softly, softly, valiant man! This is not the battlefield, but our holy St Pancras his house, who hath opened his cellars for the cheer of faithful souls. Which reminds me that our lord the King hath a royal thirst which I was on the way to quench when you delayed me. To be sure, your message is important, but shall a dying jester take precedence of a thirsty King? Soldier, God forbid! Await me here, and on my return your matter shall be attended to." So saying, the fellow edged away, and, turning a corner, was lost to sight.

Aylwin, rigid as a carving, awaited his return. More than one hurrying passer-by, shaveling monk or servitor or swaggering man-at-arms, gave him curious glances, but he heeded them not. Garth was strung for desperate action. Through the darkness which clouded his affairs he now saw one thing clearly: to deliver his Rose from the foul fate which threatened. Treachery should be repaid with treachery, and his own life should square the account. He had but the dagger in his belt, but it would serve. Once inside the hall and free to deliver Lightfoot's message, he

would mark where Sir William sat at table. Then he would approach the Earl Warenne with his scroll, and on his return strike once for all at the heart of his foe. They would kill him afterward, but, with Sir William dead, Rosamund, as a hostage not without value, would some day be restored to her father. Garth stood rehearsing in his mind the slaying of Sir William. For there must be no hitch!

The thrum of stringed music, bursts of wild laughter, and a confused buzz of talk reached him from the banquet hall, dulled by intervening walls. The sailor stood with smouldering eyes turned toward the corner where the serving-man had disappeared. Would the smug fool never come?

At last the man appeared, bearing lovingly in his fat hands a great golden chalice.

"Soldier, you are patient," said he. "This choice liquor is carefully stored, and must be carefully tended. Now you may follow me."

Aylwin followed his pompous guide along two short flagged passages to a wide curtained archway, where a page stood waiting to raise the curtain for them to enter.

"Stand where I shall set you," said the servitor, "till I have placed this libation before the King. For if I judge aright, there will be the devil to pay when you deliver your tidings, and I am a man of peace, and love not to stand near when my lord of Warenne is moved to wrath. Your blood be on your own head, soldier."

Beyond the archway they stood in a great and splendid hall, yet shut off from the body of the hall by thick hangings of damask and rich stuffs, which made a screen between those who served the feast and those who sat at the tables. Through openings in the screen Garth beheld long tables spread, and the great lords and knights of the King's army feasting and taking their ease. Hundreds of candles and tapers set in lines down the tables, and torches set in sconces in the walls, made the vast oblong room bright from end to end. The light sparkled back from shining dish and goblet, from gold and silver ornaments of the guests, and glowed on painted walls splashed with diaper patterns of blue and yellow, and on dresses of women richly wrought and

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brocaded with gold and silver thread, on jewelled wimples, on splendid cotte and surcoat of the nobles, emblazoned with armorial bearings. In the lofty roof of the hall the great strutted tie-beams remained in comparative shadow.

Much diversity of dress there was in that assembly, for while some flaunted the colours of the rainbow, many among the knights at the lower tables sat, save for their armour, in the clothes in which they rode and fought, for the army was on the march, and only the greater sort might carry courtiers' gear. Up and down the long crowded tables the Priory servants, richly dressed as became the retainers of a wealthy house, passed with food and drink for the revellers. Fragrant essences, scattered on the fresh-strewn rushes which thickly carpeted the pavement, made sweet the air.

So crowded was the hall with life and colour, so riotous with talk and mirth and music from the musicians' gallery set in the wall above the high table, that at first the seaman's dazzled eyes, straight from the comparative darkness of the outer corridors, searched vainly in the throng for the man and woman he sought.

His velvet-suited guide brought him to a point behind the screen from which he had a view of the high table, blazing with a double row of lights, at which sat the King and his greater vassals, each in his chair of carved oak with his watchful page at his back. Aylwin, rigid in concentration on his object, looked unmoved from one to another along the line of faces. He saw the Prior in the midst of the line, his great bullock face surmounting his purple robe, gobbling rapidly, and pausing in his gobble to smirk and jest, now with the knightly, anxious figure of the King on his right, garbed in bright scarlet, his breast hung with relics, in which he placed a superstitious trust, now with the Prince upon his left, straight and supple as a sword-blade, with haughty face, and eyes flashing dangerously below his thick fringe of yellow hair. On the King's right Garth recognized the grim Earl Warenne, with a face carved without fear or pity, and then came baron after baron whom he had never seen and stayed not to examine.

For suddenly, not ten paces away from him, their backs

turned toward the screen, he saw those he sought. William of Warene, darkly, insolently handsome, his smooth-shaven face beneath its fringe of black hair already flushed with wine, leaned to the girl beside him and whispered in her ear. Rosamund! Rosamund clothed like a princess in brave robe of sky-blue silk, embroidered with gold thread, and with a golden circlet about her dark and lovely brows. Her face had a pallor of ivory, and her grey eyes looked straight before her, yet she smiled at that whisper in her ear, and sat passive when the young knight's eager hand was laid upon her arm. There were other fair women seated at those tables whose smiles were freer, and who sat less coldly by their companions, but Garth had no eyes for them, and when Rosamund raised to her lips the bright silver drinking-cup which Sir William had just filled such a tempest of wrath shook him that he trembled. Then he saw that she still wore about her neck his necklace of pearls.

Garth did not know that the sound of his laboured breathing, noticeable even in the noise of the feast, was causing several servers near him to cast strange looks in his direction, or that his big sailor's fist was crushing the scroll he carried against his thigh. For a moment he forced himself to withdraw his eyes from Rosamund and her companion, and to note the progress of the golden wine goblet to the side of King Henry. He saw the velvet-clad flunkey sink to his knee and proffer it to the King, who quaffed it to the fat Prior; he saw the man rise and come away; and then, with murder in his heart, he set his hand upon his dagger's hilt, while looking along the crowded tables for some better weapon he might use.

He saw one. William was not at the high table, but a few places down from it, at the nearest of the tables which ran down the length of the hall. Several places above him was a Knight-Templar, long-haired, bearded, haughty, who wore his hauberk even at the feast, and chausses of banded mail, and over his hauberk, even on this warm May night, his white cloak, marked on the shoulder with a blood-red cross. Over the carved back of his oak chair was hitched his belt, with his great sword.

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Aylwin noted with cold precision the exact place of that sword. Let him but wrench that from its sheath, and a single stride would take him to his enemy. None would have time to intervene. One blow straight down upon that dark, smooth neck below the fringe of curled black hair and William of Warenne would smile and whisper no more!

He looked once again upon his enemy, so soon and unexpectedly to die. Sir William leaned again to his companion. His left arm sought her waist, and Rosamund stiffened and drew away. But the flushed, wine-heated face was close to hers. Around the tables other guests, undeterred by the royal presence or the sacred character of the building, gave free rein to the passions of the hour, and the feast was becoming a scene of licence. The musicians played ever more lustily, and the riot of talk and laughter increased every minute as the cups went round. But Garth saw nothing now save those two before him and the Templar's great sword.

He started forward through the gap in the screen, only to run full tilt into the arms of the Prior's stout servitor, returning empty-handed. The violence of the collision brought them both to a stand.

"Devil take you for a clumsy fool, soldier!" gasped the man, grabbing Garth by the arm. "Did I not say wait till my return? What ails you, man?" He stood staring at the sailor's clouded face, but Garth swung him violently aside and strode forward into the hall. And at that same moment Rosamund, struggling in the clasp of her half-tipsy lover, met for one moment Aylwin's blazing glance.

He saw her startled flash of recognition, saw her go white and sink back in her chair. In that instant his brain resumed its mastery.

If she spoke all was lost. William's back was to him. Rosamund, as she sank back, read an imperious message, saw warning fingers pressed on tight-shut lips, then no more, for Garth had sprung back behind the damask curtain, and young Warenne, with hot, panting breath, was bending over her.

None of these had seen the fat Prior of St Pancras touch his royal guest on the shoulder, while he pointed down the hall, or King Henry, with flushed face and angry eyes, spring from his chair. The serving-man was still rating Aylwin with voluble tongue when a shout of execration went up from all the tables, filling the hall with clamour. Every guest, drunk or sober, was on his feet, staring toward the entrance. The twanging of the musicians was drowned in the uproar.

It lasted perhaps while a man might draw a couple of breaths; then, with a commanding gesture, Henry raised his hand above his head, and there fell suddenly a dead silence.

"Be seated, lords," commanded the King in a voice of cold fury, "while we hear what this traitor Simon sends us by the mouth of these reverend Bishops. My lords of London and Worcester"—his voice rang down the hall—"we do not forget our duty to Holy Church, though some of her servants forget their duty to their King. What is your message from the Earl of Leicester?" The King sat down, crossed his arms, and glowered down the length of the hall.

Drawing aside the corner of the screen, Aylwin looked over the heads of the attendants and beheld the two Bishops, each with his chaplain behind him, standing between armed knights midway down the tables.

Walter de Cantelupe, Bishop of Worcester, made reply. A grey-haired, mildly speaking man, grown old in the service of King and State at home and abroad, yet so benignant that it was said he had enjoined all priests in his diocese every Sunday to warn both mothers and nurses not to keep their tender infants too close to them, lest by chance they should be suffocated, but to let them lie firmly propped up in their cradles. He stood forth now undaunted by the angry hostility of King and barons to deliver his message.

"Most noble King," said he in his even tones, amid the deep silence, "right truly doth it grieve us, the least of God's servants, if we seem to merit your anger. Right humbly and loyally do we stand before you, desiring nothing so greatly

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as the honour and well-being of your Highness, and the peace of this distracted realm of England. Will it please you read this letter from the noble Earl of Leicester and his barons, whose hope and desire it is that your royal wisdom shall incline you to favourable consideration." The Bishop held forth the parchment.

Henry gave a bitter laugh. "Shall we soil our fingers with traitor's letters? Read it to us, my lord."

The old man passed the taunt with grave humility, and unrolled the scroll. With a clear, level voice he read it in the hearing of all.

"To their most excellent lord, Henry, by the grace of God the illustrious King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Aquitaine, the Barons and other his lieges, wishing to observe their oath and faith to God and him, send health, and due service with honour and reverence. Since it is apparent by many proofs that certain among those who surround you have uttered many falsehoods against us to your Lordship, devising all the evil in their power not only towards us, but towards yourself and your whole kingdom, may your Excellency know, that we wish to preserve the health and safety of your person with all our might, and, with the fidelity due to you, propose only to resist with all means in our power those persons, who are not only our enemies, but yours and the whole kingdom's. May it please you not to believe their falsehoods. We shall always be found your liegemen, and we, the Earl of Leicester and Gilbert de Clare, at the request of others, have affixed our seals for ourselves. Given in the Weald, near Lewes, on the first Tuesday after the feast of St Pancras."

The King laughed again, more harshly. The angry flush was redder on his finely chiselled, mobile face—a face in which strength and weakness were curiously mixed.

"These are loving words," said he. "Loving words should go with loving deeds, my lords. And for loving deeds we have our fond liegemen ranged in arms against us, laying siege to our castles and fire to our cities!"

Cantelupe turned to his brother of London, and Richard de Sandwich bent low before the King.

"Lord King, your humble lieges deal not in words alone. The noble Earl of Leicester bids us offer to your Grace the

sum of fifty thousand marks, in compensation for such damage and spoil as may have befallen through no wish of his during the late disturbance of the realm, with the sole provision that your Highness shall be pleased to cause the observance of those Statutes of Oxford to which you have set your hand and seal. And the said Earl of Leicester, and all and every the barons and lords with him, will faithfully abide by the decision of selected Churchmen, competent by their wisdom and sound theology to determine what Statutes shall remain in force, and how far their previous oaths shall be binding—your dutiful barons and liegemen wishing by this device to keep their faith as Christians and avoid the stain of perjury.”

Some moments of strained silence followed the speech of the ambassadors; then with one motion clamour broke loose. With blazing eyes the tall Prince Edward sprang to his feet, his heavy chair crashing to the floor behind him.

“This to the King of England!” he shouted. His young face flamed, and with an impetuous gesture he flung back the tawny hair from his forehead. “King and my father, let me speak! Go back, my lords: go back quickly while the King’s anger still remembers your Churchmen’s privilege, and say to that damned traitor Simon and all his rebel knights that they shall have no peace till they come before us with halters round their necks and surrender themselves for us to hang them up or drag them down. Lord King, have I spoken well?”

A roar of acclamation answered his fierce words, subsiding as Henry stood again.

“There speaks a true son of Anjou!” cried he. “My lords, you have your answer. Hear it, nevertheless, from me, the King. Say to Simon de Montfort, Gilbert de Clare, and their accomplices that since it manifestly appears by the war and disturbance raised by you in our kingdom, by conflagrations and outrageous damages, that you do not observe your allegiance to us, nor have any regard to the security of our person, and inasmuch as you have lawlessly oppressed those barons and other our lieges who adhere with constancy to their troth, we therefore, considering their

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grievance as our own, and their enemies as ours, value not your faith or love, and do defy you as our enemies!"

If the Prince's defiance had been received with approving clamour, the King's was the signal for a yet wilder outburst. Barons and knights leaped up; swords were drawn and brandished above wine-flushed faces; shouts and insults assailed the priestly messengers, who stood pale before the tempest of wrath. When the riot abated a little Walter de Cantelupe made a last brave effort.

"In God's name, lord King, consider yet once again!" he urged, in a voice that now rang boldly, though well he knew in that fierce assembly the appeal might cost him dear. "This bleeding realm of England——"

"Liars and traitors!" The Bishop's plea was drowned by a roaring, bull-like voice. Richard King of the Romans, the parsimonious brother of the King, raging with resentment at the recent plunder of his property in London and at the disrespect to his over-weening pride, was stamping on the floor. "Liars and traitors, will you bandy words with the King? We do defy you all as public enemies, and with all our might whenever we may we will labour to damage you. And we do firmly adhere to the King of England, with sincere faith and force, and Simon de Montfort and his accomplices in their treason we do most utterly defy!"

"Go!" cried King Henry, "while yet our forbearance keeps open your road. Within the hour you shall take our answer in writing. Princes and loyal knights, we pledge you our love and thanks!"

He raised the golden goblet to his lips, and with a great shout of "God save the King!" the whole assembly rose and pledged him in turn.

Thereafter followed confusion. The messengers had left the hall, escorted by a file of spearmen. The tipsiest warrior in that hall understood that after a defiance so absolute the Barons' army had no course but the red path of battle or ignominious flight. And for all the fratricidal bitterness that filled them, none there was so ignorant of the quality of the men they had to deal with as to imagine that de Montfort might take that challenge meekly.

The Keys of England

Captain Garth Aylwin, whose individual drama had been for a space overwhelmed in this great tragedy of the nation unfolded before his eyes, saw the spear-points of the guard moving toward the doors, saw the assembly break into excited groups, and, dropping the curtain he had held, sought again for William de Warenne.

The young knight was no longer in his place. Garth hesitated not, but strode into the hall, unstayed by the menials, upon whose white, pasty faces consternation was written. Far away at the end of the refectory, behind the high table now half emptied of its illustrious occupants, he caught a glimpse, over the intervening heads of men and women, of the tall figure he sought and of the sky-blue robe of his companion. He pressed forward, cursed by more than one fierce lord as he forced a way. Sir William passed through a gap in the damask, dragging his companion by the hand. Aylwin marked the blaze of passion in his dark eyes, the fear in hers. Furious and unreflecting, the seaman plunged in pursuit.

CHAPTER XI

THE ESCAPE FROM THE PRIORY

THE vaulted corridors were dim after that illuminated hall. The first passage into which he burst was empty, but short, and led into a longer one crossing it at right angles. Glancing right and left, Aylwin perceived at the farther extremity of the right-hand corridor a solitary monk kneeling before an image in a niche, the moonlight from an open cloister behind him shining on his shaven head. Paying no heed to the approaching footsteps, the monk continued to pour forth his prayers.

The sailor took him unceremoniously by the shoulder. "Your pardon, holy sir. I seek most urgently Lord William of Warenne. Hath he passed here? With a lady, Father?"

"Avaunt!" cried the kneeling man, crouching lower before the image as he turned upon his interrupter the burning eyes of a devotee. "What know I of lords and their wantons? O holy Pancras, behold thy house defiled by evil men, who flaunt their lechery before thy very altars. They even who should be thy faithful servants have given themselves to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. O pure and youthful martyr, before whose tomb the sin of the perjurer is laid bare, so that he falleth dead or is forthwith seized of devils, make haste to restore the honour of thine house! Let cleansing fires——"

The petitioner's pious zeal was rudely interrupted. A great hand on the collar of his habit shook him till the teeth rattled in his head. "Damned shaveling, attend!" shouted Garth, beside himself with impatience. "Tell me quickly if any has passed this way!"

The monk this time faced fairly round, glaring balefully

on the disturber of his devotions. But even his zealot's heart quailed a little before the look that met him.

"Impious man, depart!" he commanded. "None has passed. The holy Pancras——"

But Aylwin stayed to hear no more of saint or devil. Running back hotfoot the way he had come, to the opposite end of the vaulted way, he saw the moonlight through an open door, and ran out into the May night.

Before him stretched a wide expanse of turf. Beyond loomed a dark circle of trees. Into the shadow of the trees the figure of a man was disappearing with a woman struggling in his arms.

Like a hound loosed on the quarry Garth fled across the grass. But the belt of trees was thick, and when he reached it the flying figure had vanished.

He listened with straining ears. From the direction of the refectory faint sounds still reached him, but all was still about him. Suddenly a woman's shriek pierced the silence, and he plunged forward in the direction of the cry.

"Lord William, have pity! Garth—Garth Aylwin! O God, help!"

"Sweet obstinacy, there is no help. To-morrow is for battle, but to-night shall be for love. Ha!"

An inarticulate shout, a rending and snapping of boughs as a dark shape came bursting through, gave the son of Warenne an instant's warning. Ready hand flew to ready sword, but the steel was not fully drawn ere the leaping fury was on him. A blinding blow from a great fist full between the eyes laid the Earl's son senseless.

"Rose of the World, it is I, Garth, thy lover! Dost hear me, sweetheart?"

"Garth—Garth! O merciful Christ!"

Trembling from her struggle, wild-eyed, she clung to him as he knelt beside her. "Save me, Garth!"

He held her in a close embrace ere he loosed her clinging arms. "Let me finish this black hound of Warenne before the pack gets on our scent!" He strode to the fallen knight and snatched out the half-drawn sword.

Before he could drive it home Rosamund was on her feet,

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clutching his uplifted arm. "Garth, the man is helpless, and the Earl is brother-in-law to the King!"

"Hinder me not, Rose." Aylwin, his blue eyes glittering frostily in the thin moonlight, shifted the sword to his left hand. "By God and all His saints, I would kill him were he the King's own self!"

"But not as he lies helpless—you, a baron of Rye!"

"Words!" said Aylwin harshly. "I know what I do. Stand away, Rose. Time presses."

"Indeed, indeed it does!" came her whispered answer as she threw herself before him and pointed urgently toward the darkness of the trees.

The place to which de Warenne had brought her was a smooth patch of turf bordering one of the fishponds of the Priory. The moonlight fell silvery on the still surface of the water, where here and there yellow water-lilies were opening. Across the water, where Rosamund pointed, a broad pathway approached the bank through the trees, and along the path, perhaps two hundred paces distant, two figures walked, deep in converse.

The warning was only just in time. Gripping the girl by the hand, Aylwin plunged for the shadows. The path by which the two men were advancing led back toward another part of the Priory. The fugitives struck back parallel with it, and crouched in the shadows to let the men pass by.

"It is the Prior and Prince Edward!" whispered the girl. "They will find Lord William, and raise the alarm."

"I should have thrust his sword through him!" muttered the sailor. "Dead men tell no tales. Come, the Priory gates. It is our one chance, Rose."

The walkers were nearing the fishpond. He drew Rosamund out on the path behind them, and together they ran swiftly in the opposite direction. As they neared the avenue end a cowed monk met them. Garth accosted him without a moment's hesitation.

"Father, there has been foul play here. Pray you come quickly. The noble knight Sir William de Warenne——" Seizing the monk by the arm, he led him unsuspecting under the trees, and next moment took him powerfully by the

throat and flung him to the ground. "Cry out," said Garth grimly, "and I stab you to the heart. Be silent, and all shall be well with you. Rose, loose me this fellow's girdle."

Swiftly, though with hands that trembled, the girl did his bidding, while Garth felt the monk's fat carcass shaking in his hold. "Holy sir," he reassured him, "while you are silent you are safe, but you deal with desperate folk. We must borrow your cassock and your hood. Will you lend your coat and keep your life?"

The half-choking man signed assent, and Aylwin released his throttling grip. "Off with it quickly, Father."

The monk obeyed, and stood quaking in his shift. Garth cut his long girdle in two, and with deft sailor's fingers secured the owner's arms behind him and made him fast to a tree. As a last precaution he gagged him with a piece of dead wood and a strip torn from his clothing. Then he removed the monk's sandals.

"Now, sweetheart, off with your shoes and on with this holy gear." He handed her sandals, cassock, and cowl. "Come quickly," he ordered, when the transformation was made. He led the way toward the gate, and as they made for the distant flaring torches they heard a cry from behind them.

"They have found him," said Garth. "Now God grant I hit him hard enough to stiffen his tongue a little longer!"

They drew near to the great gates and the torches and the double line of guards. The banquet had broken up, and a tide of folk of all conditions was pouring outward, on horseback and afoot. The seeming monk and the man-at-arms moved unnoticed in the throng, for every man was full of the scene that had just passed in the refectory, and every tongue was eagerly discussing the prospects of the now inevitable struggle. Unchallenged the two fared forth from the Priory walls, and found themselves among the tented flats and the flickering camp-fires.

The great Priory, and the entire circuit of its strong enclosing walls, lay outside the walls of the town itself and the palisade which supplemented them. Aylwin led his

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companion along beneath the Priory walls to where he had seen the tethered horses on his way in.

"We must fetch a circuit about the town, Rose," said he. "But the way is long, and we must find a mount."

"These are guarded every one," said she.

"Guards or no guards, we must have horses, and swift ones. You have not forgotten how to bestride a horse, Rosamund?"

"Try me, and see!" she laughed courageously under her cowl. "But, oh, Garth, how to gain one?"

"Rough knocks or smooth words, as heaven shall appoint," said he. They went on a little way: then, leaning to the cowl, he muttered, "Rose, the oak-tree yonder standing by itself, with six horses tethered."

"I see it."

"How many men do you see?"

Rosamund peered into the shadow cast by the great tree. It stood in a slight hollow, some hundred paces from the Priory walls.

"One, my Garth, and that one sleeping."

"As a dog sleeps, most like, with one eye open. But we will try him. Leave the talk for me, Rose of the World, but, once mounted, ride beside me like the wind!"

"To life or death, my captain," said the girl's voice under the hood, as they stole toward the shadowy group.

The six horses stood fastened only by their bridles to a low limb of the oak, and just beyond reach of their heels their guardian lay wrapped in his cloak, his head pillowed on his arm. He snored on steadily as they stood and watched him.

Aylwin looked from the sleeper to his charges, sorely tempted to slip the bridles of two of them and ride off; sorely tempted, too, to crack the fellow on the head as a saving preliminary. Instead he stooped and shook the man by the arm.

The soldier leaped up, staring, hand on dagger-hilt. "Fiends of hell, who are ye?" he demanded.

"Gently, comrade," said the sailor. "There are no fiends here, but a holy brother of St Pancras, and a simple soldier like thyself. Tell us, whose horses are these?"

"Whose should they be but my lord Earl Percy's? And what is that to thee?"

"Why, right good news indeed," answered Aylwin. "Holy Father, by the blessing of God and St Pancras, this is our man. Stay, though, comrade, tell me thy name, for I would not give the noble Earl's message to the wrong ears."

"My name is Jocelyn," said the soldier, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "What is this message?"

"It seems you are our man. And yet, comrade Jocelyn, I was taught to be cautious. Tell us the name of the squire who is with the Earl, and if it be the same as was told us you shall have the message straightway."

"The squire is Peter Rich, of Arundel."

"Good!" said Aylwin. "Without a doubt, Father, here is our man. 'A stout, dark knave,' his Worship said, 'with six horses underneath an oak-tree in a dell.' He did not say a sleepy knave, Jocelyn."

"Sleepy!" exclaimed the soldier. "Thou liar! I was but taking my ease."

"Oh, Jocelyn, Jocelyn!" said the sailor mockingly, "if the holy St Pancras heard thee utter such untruth beneath his very walls, assuredly thy wretched life were forfeit! Why, I could have walked away with the Earl's horses and left thee snoring like a pig. This holy man is my witness."

"Now, by God's death——" began the sentinel.

"Perjure not thyself, comrade," said Aylwin. "We are no tale-bearers. Nor have we time to lose, for we have also messages for others. Know that there are mighty tidings in the Priory to-night. The Earl of Leicester hath sent an embassy seeking peace from the King—the Bishops of London and Worcester, no less—and our lord the King and the Prince have spurned them in the presence of all the feasters. I tell you, they have gone back with a flea in their ears."

"Ha! Say you so? Then that means battle."

"Bloody battle, Jocelyn. And soon. For the Earl's force lies in Fletching Forest, and must either fight or fly. And thou knowest if de Montfort is the man to fly."

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"None ever said that of the Earl of Leicester. But your message, comrade?"

"This: my lord Percy remains this night at the Priory, conferring with the King. You are to lead four horses straightway to the banquet hall, leaving here only his own and the squire's. And hasten quickly back, for in the meantime I must take your watch."

"That is an odd message," said the soldier, peering uneasily at the tall man-at-arms and the silent black figure of the monk.

"The times are odd," answered Aylwin shortly. "Nevertheless, if your caution doubts it, this reverend man and I on our return to the Earl will so advise him. Resolve quickly; shall we stay or return?"

"The fiend take me if I know!" said the soldier, rubbing his chin. "The Earl is an ill man to cross, and this of the Earl of Leicester is big news. It was said King Henry would be reconciled with him."

"The Priory buzzes with it like a beehive," said Aylwin. "Behold the Prior's guests pouring yonder from the gates. In half an hour it will be all over camp and town. Haste and choose, comrade, for we have other work to do."

"Tell me first your names," the sentinel persisted.

"Garth Aylwin is my name, and I follow Lord William of Warenne. As for this holy man, whose tongue is under a vow, his name I know not, nor care to know, save that the same Lord William holds him in high favour."

This deceitful truth, uttered with a convincing grimness, seemed to decide the wavering man-at-arms. "Well, I go," he grumbled. "But see you look well to the horses, comrade Aylwin, for Earl Percy hath a fiery temper, and thinketh more of that destrier of his than of your life and mine together."

"I do readily believe it," answered Garth as Jocelyn took the four bridles in his hand and prepared to mount. "I will cherish the brave beasts as life itself. But come back quickly, for our business presses."

"If it press you from those horses," growled Jocelyn, as he rode away, "it is well you have one close who can shrive you at need."

Garth threw himself on the ground in view of the departing rider, and Rosamund seated herself beside him. He felt her eager trembling beneath the cassock.

"Bravely played, Rose of the World!" he muttered "When friend Jocelyn comes to port with his freight William of Warenne will have a sour taste in his mouth! Come now, let us try these famous steeds." He rose and went to the two remaining horses.

"Jocelyn is not yet at the gate," warned Rosamund.

"He is far enough. He has four beasts to look to. Once we are mounted he will never catch us. Come." He slipped the bridles from the branch, and, seating Rosamund on the squire's horse, led the Earl's destrier out from under the tree.

But Rosamund was watching the diminishing figure of Jocelyn, silhouetted against the flare of torches at the gates.

"Garth, he has stopped!" she cried. "He has seen us! He gallops back!"

Garth leaped into the saddle. "Now ride!" said he, low and tensely. He struck the great horse with his heels, and they were off like the wind, the thuds of the pounding hoofs half drowning the shouts that arose behind them.

The wind of the flight rushed past their ears. Figures ran out from camp-fires to right and left, crying on them to halt. Trumpets blared alarm, but ere men could answer the call the fugitives left them far behind. Straight as an arrow, southward into the eye of the moon Aylwin galloped, and the squire's horse with his lighter burden kept stride for stride beside him. Time and again a bow twanged, and a shaft sang past them, loosed by some readier archer. Then a crossbowman, rushing from a tent as they swept by, took vicious aim from close at hand, and the bolt, catching Aylwin below the heart, made him reel and well-nigh unhorsed him.

"Garth! Oh, God, you are hit!" cried Rosamund, beginning to draw rein.

"Ride!" he gasped, doubling with the pain of the blow. "I wear—a Spanish mail-coat. The dog will shoot again!"

The archer loosed a second bolt, but the iron head

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shattered in sparks on a stone in their path, and the Earl's great horse only shied and pounded on.

And now the tumult and the shouting was dying behind them. The camp-fires had thinned away, till as the horses' hoofs still thundered over the turf there remained but a single fire, which lay right in their path. Garth never swerved, but held straight on under the moon, with intent just to clear the circle of the firelight and the tent which gleamed whitely near.

Suddenly, as though sprung from the very earth, the shape of a horseman in full armour emerged from a clump of gorse. The moonbeams glinted on his mail and the shaft of his long lance as he set it in rest, and horse and man hurled themselves forward.

"Wheel left—for your life, Rose!" As she swerved in swift obedience Garth charged straight for the murderous spear-point a hundred paces away. He had never ridden in the lists, and well he knew he could not face that rushing death, but ten yards away he tried a trick he had seen the desert riders use, ducking flat to the saddle and at the same instant swerving his beast violently to the right. But Captain Garth Aylwin was no desert horseman. The destrier reared madly, receiving the cruel lancehead full in his unprotected neck, and Garth heard the snap of the broken shaft and the scream of the wounded brute as he shot like a stone from the saddle into a gorse bush. The bush broke his fall and saved his life, and as he staggered dizzily to his feet, scratched and bruised and bleeding, he beheld his adversary pinned to the ground by the weight of his armour, beside his own fallen and kicking steed. Even as Aylwin approached the knight's horse reeled to its feet and stood a moment, panting in terror. Far off, Rosamund was trying to rein in.

Figures came running from the tent with brandished weapons. The moonlit turf seemed to Aylwin to heave about him like the green sea-billows as he launched himself at the panting horse, hardly less shaken than he. The poor brute, spurred by the fresh terror of an unaccustomed rider, sprang forward in a lather of sweat, lashing out furiously at

the shouting figures. Swaying dizzily in the saddle, Garth headed his course to rejoin the vanishing form in the cassock. "Ride!" he jerked at her as he came up. And on they went again.

The Ouse wound gleaming on their left in flood tide under the moon. The camp lay far behind them now, and pursuit was over. They slackened rein at last, leaving the quivering horses to amble side by side. A white hand came out from under the monk's robe and touched Aylwin's arm.

"Are you hurt, Garth?"

"Nothing but a shake, sweetheart. A man grows soft, recovering from wounds."

She reined in, throwing back the cowl, and her fair face leaned toward him like a flower, her grey eyes glowing in the moonlight.

"Garth, we must rest awhile. Oh, my dear, you are all blood, and so white!"

"Am I so? It is the pale light, Rose, and the scratch of a thorn. That outpost nearly shipwrecked us, and, by the Mass, I have not gained in exchanging mounts. This poor brute is lame with his fall. Come"—he started the horse again—"the good Jocelyn may still be on our track, and we have yet far to go. We must ride clear round the King's camp to find our friends."

"Friends!" she repeated, staring forward into the night. "That word has a good sound. Dear God, how I fear to wake again in that hateful castle bower!"

"Never!" cried Garth. "You shall awake in your father's house at Rye."

Rosamund smiled at him. "You have not always told the truth this night, my dear. I had not thought you so quick of invention. But you lied to save me, and not, like Lord William, to destroy me. Garth, they told me you were slain."

"Why, so I nearly was," he answered. "And had it lain with that accursed ravisher I should be hanging now in chains at the castle yonder, or rotting in one of his father's dungeons, while he had his will of you, my Rose. Rose, I have much to tell you."

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A wave of bitterness went over him at the foretaste of what he must tell her first. Up to now the sheer surprise of finding her at Lewes, the sheer adventure of snatching her from the fingers of his enemy, had kept that tormenting thought at the back of his mind; now on the quiet down it chilled him.

Through the mild May night they rode the hills round Lewes, keeping the King's watch-fires always on their right hand, as they fetched a wide circuit from south to north-west. Rosamund rode bareheaded now, her hair, loosened by the flight, blown by the night breeze in a dark cloud about her face. Closely as they rode, she seemed to Aylwin to have become suddenly and strangely remote. The stimulus of imminent peril and the imperative spur to strenuous action past, he was overcome with a sense of helplessness at the thought of the news he had to give her.

To Rosamund, on the other hand, the subtle sweet scents of the free downland, the magic of the young spring night about them, the presence of her lover riding stark and silent at her side, seemed to bring a steadily reviving confidence. Presently she began to sing:

" Il est apelé de Montfort !
Il est el Mond, et si est fort——"

Garth turned to see her white face smiling radiantly on him out of the dark jumble of the cassock. "Why do you sing, Rose?" said he.

"Should not a prisoned damsel sing when her champion has burst her prison bars and delivered her from the ogre's castle?"

"A fine champion I!" he burst out bitterly, and turned his bruised body in the saddle to look about him. They had ridden a long way now, and his horse's lameness had increased so that it could scarcely limp along. They had got to the northward of the town, and its distant lights, and the glimmer of the scattered camp-fires, shone wanly under the sinking moon. Before them the forest stretched, a mystery of silvery green. At the forest's edge, with the hills between them and the town, they came to a little track, and

followed it into the shadows. Aylwin reined in his horse, and got down stiffly from the saddle. "We must wait here for the dawn, Rose," said he. "For dawn and our friends." His own voice sounded strange to his ears. The time had come to tell her.

From his tone, and his pale, stern face as he helped her dismount, Rosamund sensed his distress. Her soft hands took his blood-marked face between them. "Dear Garth, let me now tend your hurts. I am very certain you are hurt, Garth."

Thrilling to her touch, he took her hands and kissed them, then stumbled straight into his trouble. "I think there is only one who can tend my hurt if he will, and that is our father the Pope," said he. "I go to Rome, Rose, to find the keys of heaven or hell!" With heavy deliberation he tied the weary horses to a tree, and came back to where she stood. He took off his jacket and made her sit down upon it, then hunched his great frame on a spreading root beside her, and gazed at her hungrily out of haggard eyes. "Rose, I am a man whom Fate has cursed," he said.

Rosamund was trembling now. A thought flashed through her mind, and she gave it utterance, blessing the shadows that hid her cheeks.

"Garth, my lover, as God sees us, I never yielded. I am as ever I was."

"I know. Diccon Lightfoot told me," he answered dully. "But I am not. There is a curse on me."

She felt the blood ebb back from her face. "Garth— Garth, what mean you?"

Violently he struck with his clenched hand on the ring-mail shirt uncovered by the removal of his jacket. "This Spanish shirt which saved my life to-night was given me by my wife, Rose."

Rosamund caught at her bosom. The forest trees danced before her eyes. She felt suddenly numbed. From a gulf of blackness she saw her lover's ruddy-gold hair gleam like a flame where a filtering moonbeam touched it. After a long silence her voice reached him.

"Say that again—about your Spanish shirt."

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"Adela of Udimore—have you heard of her?"

"Her name is in many mouths," murmured Rosamund.

"Aye."

"They say she is a witch of beauty, and hath snared many knights to their undoing."

"She snared me to mine," said Aylwin bitterly. "And lest Death should pick the trap she sent me this ring-mail shirt."

Rosamund saw the anguish in his eyes. "Garth," cried she, "what are you saying? What is this you are telling me?"

"A jest to make devils laugh, my Rose of the World," he answered harshly. "The jest of a witch who found a dying man babbling of you, a witch who answered gently when he spoke your name in his fever, who made Adela of Udimore stand for Rosamund of Rye, and fee'd Holy Church to cheat God. Such a jest as Satan's self could not better or sane men believe."

Rosamund leaned tensely forward, her cold hand covering his.

"Garth, answer me only this, and afterwards you shall tell me what you will. Are you still my lover?"

"To the last breath, Rose!"

He felt the trembling of her body as she drew him to her and set his arm about her. Life had come back to her voice when she spoke again, though her speech came with a sob in it. "Tell me all from the beginning."

So, sitting there with his arm about her, her hand fast in his, and the last moonlight dying in the darkening forest, Captain Garth Aylwin told all he knew himself of the strange fate which had befallen him. When all was said he waited long, fearing greatly, for her to speak.

At last Rosamund lifted her face to his and kissed him, and he saw her eyes shining. "Sweetheart, we are in bad case," said she softly. "And yet there is a holy text that comes into my mind."

"Of what use to us are holy texts?"

"Why, of that you must judge, my dear, when you hear it. It is this: 'The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man

looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

“That is monkish talk, Rosamund.”

“Who dressed me for a monk?” she smiled.

“But we two are living man and woman.”

He felt her hand tighten on his. “Must I explain my text, my dear? Garth, if the Lady Adela speaks truth, you are wed to her in the eyes of men.”

“Aye. And chained to her with the bands of Holy Church.”

“Yet it was me whom you thought to wed.”

“Rose, Rose, what mean you?” he cried, with a sudden fierce grip that gave her an exquisite pain.

“‘The Lord looketh on the heart.’ Before Him we two are man and wife already.”

At that, while he strained her to him, Garth sat dumb-founded. At last he found his voice.

“But our father the Pope is God’s vicegerent. The Church binds faster than links of steel. If the Pope——”

Her soft hand over his mouth stopped his foreboding. “The Lord looketh on the heart. I am your wife if you will have it so.”

“If I will have it so!” he cried. “Oh, sweetheart! By the Redeemer, if Rome reject me, I will take you away to lands where you shall reign a queen, my bride, my Rose of the World!”

“But first you must go to Rome, Garth.” She gave him her lips, and pillowed her head on his breast. “I shall pray for your journey, dear, though it is a far way to Rome, and we are not great folk to move the Holy See.”

“We are barons of Rye,” said Garth, “and the *Royal Richard* will not sail empty. The cardinals, maybe, will look kindly on Madame Justice dressed in a golden robe.” A new hope rang in his voice. “You will wait for me, Rosamund?”

“Come in winter storm or summer sun, you will find me at the landing, sweetheart.”

“Thou true, dear heart!” he muttered, pressing her to him. “My curse is lifted. And, see, the dawn is here!”

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Down the tunnel of the forest-path by which they had entered from the hills a patch of sky showed grey with the growing light. Above them in the branches a twittering of birds had begun.

"It is not so far to Rye," said Rosamund. "Garth, shall we start?"

"Very soon, Rose. And when you come to your father's house you must tell Master Farr to make ready my ship for a long journey. Let him stock her well, and call in my men, and let him set aboard her my share of the treasure I brought home the day they made him Bailiff."

"But Garth, you come with me?" Her voice was sharp with apprehension.

"Not yet, but very soon, sweetheart," he answered, stroking her hand. "You are to pray for me, are you not?"

"Every day, my lover!"

"Then I must earn your sweet prayers. You saw what befell in the Priory banquet hall."

A shudder moved her at the memory, and her eyes questioned him.

"King Henry defies the Earl of Leicester and his lords. But I have learned that Earl Simon fights for God's justice and the right liberties of Englishmen. If he goes down, all England goes down with him. In this great test which is at hand all true men must stand by him, and Garth Aylwin among the rest. Lord Simon trusted me to guide back those good Bishops his messengers. When you pray to God for me you shall pray for one who keeps faith with God's cause. Else how should your prayers be heard, my Rose?"

"But you are not fit for fighting, Garth!" She gazed earnestly on his pale and haggard face.

Aylwin smiled a little grimly. "Why, then, I will drive a baggage-mule," said he. "But indeed I am very fit. A bruised man is not a broken man, my dear. Hark! What comes?"

From the Downs came a distant jingle of harness and a padding of hoofs on the turf. It drew nearer, and the neigh of an approaching horse was answered from the tree to

which Aylwin had fastened their own. A troop of mounted archers entered the forest-path.

Garth reached for his dagger, but a moment later recognized William de Blund among the riders, and at his side his own man Lightfoot, wearing his own coat of a forester in the Barons' army. The knight, his visor open, rode up to where the lovers stood together, Rosamund still in her monkish disguise, her pale cheeks suddenly scarlet under the free glance of his gay eyes. The gay glance turned to a frown.

"In God's name, Captain Aylwin, what means this woodland idyll? Is this the time——"

"Ay, this is the time," answered Garth dourly. "Ye had my message from Diccon Lightfoot there?"

"By God's grace, we did, or we were like to have missed the way. He swore you would meet us and guide us back. Man, this needs explaining."

"And shall have it at the right time. Sir, this is Mistress Rosamund Farr, daughter of the Bailiff of Rye, a loyal friend to Earl Simon. Her father promised her to me in marriage, and she was treacherously carried off by Lord William of Warenne."

"Tyrant son of a tyrant father," said de Blund. "Madame, you are fortunate to have escaped his claws." He saluted Rosamund respectfully. "Meanwhile, valiant Captain, the Earl of Leicester awaits his messengers, and his messengers await their guide."

"They shall not be delayed," answered Aylwin. "Pray you send Lightfoot hither with provender for a day's journey, for he must conduct this lady to her father."

"Lightfoot you shall have, but provender you cannot have, for there is not a breakfast among us, nor will be till we reach camp. They fed us yonder overnight, but dismissed us this morning without so much as a crust of bread or a cup of wine. But that I am a prudent man," the young knight laughed, "and had stuffed a portion of my supper in my saddle-holster, the poor Bishops would have made this journey fasting. The King and his lords may feast well in the Priory hall, but, by my faith, I think their army is hard put to it for a meal in

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this wild country of yours. Their foragers have skinned the country clean, and the wretched folk are starving, if a man may believe the soldiers. Therefore I counsel you to bring the lady with you to Fletching. Doubtless our good Earl will give her courteous entertainment."

Aylwin turned to the girl. "Rose, will you come to Fletching? The Earl of Leicester keeps an iron discipline. You need not fear to pass through his army. The knight's counsel is good, sweetheart, and the country farther inland will be safer for your journey."

"I fear nothing," answered Rosamund, "save only the walls of Lewes Castle."

"Bravely answered!" exclaimed de Blund. "Earl Simon de Montfort hath many cares upon his mind, but I warrant, he will give good welcome to your father's daughter. Madame, the Portsmen have served England well."

"Sir, I thank you," answered Rosamund. "When I come to Rye I will repeat to my father your Worship's good words."

Garth brought up the horses, and they rejoined the escort, taking their way through the forest to de Montfort's camp.

CHAPTER XII

THE KING'S SPY

ROSAMUND FARR and Diccon Lightfoot rode along a woodland glade, steering south-eastward by the sun. The seaman whistled gaily, but the Bailiff's daughter, whom a few hours' rest in the Barons' camp had poorly compensated for the strain of the past night, went in thoughtful silence. She wore the rough pelisse of a peasant woman, but the cotte beneath it, and the wimple on her dark hair which showed under the hood of the pelisse, were the same she had worn at the royal banquet.

From time to time as they rode an imperious hail would halt them, generally from a challenger himself unseen until he stepped out from the shelter of some thicket. Then they would give the password of the Barons, "The white lion." The challenger would ask again, "By what mark?" and they would answer with the countersign, "The white cross," as he stood aside to give them passage.

When they had been riding thus for an hour, and it was some time since they had halted, and the woods were thinning in front of them, Lightfoot broke into a chanty.

The girl watched him, and smiled when at the song's end he gave her a sidelong glance to see how she took it.

"Shouldst rather be named Lightheart than Lightfoot, Diccon," said Rosamund.

"Faith, mistress, I should be a dull dog did I not bark a little on so brave a morning, and with three so good causes for lightness."

"What causes, Diccon?"

"Firstly, that I have escaped an odious service and entered a gracious one; secondly, that my captain thinks so well of

my loyalty as to give me his most precious jewel in charge, which is yourself, madame; thirdly, because we are on our way to Rye."

"And when think you we shall come to Rye?"

"That is as God wills, mistress. With good luck, to-night. With less luck, to-morrow. But better make a long journey in safety than risk to fall in with any folk of those black Warennes. De Warenne's arm is a long arm, mistress."

"Yet I think he will need the last inch of it when the battle is joined to-morrow," said Rosamund.

"How know you it will be to-morrow?"

"Because his Grace of Leicester told me so himself. Dick, you who have seen camps and war, what think you of this camp of Earl Simon's?"

"A soldier's camp, lady. A right dangerous camp for our lord the King. In Lewes men feast and make shameful merriment, but at Fletching they watch and pray. It is ill work fighting men who think God and the saints march with them."

"Yet the Earl seems anxious," Rosamund said. "Not all his barons are firm in loyalty. Many have deserted him, and each day brings its defaulters."

"There are rats in every ship," said Lightfoot with composure. "But Earl Simon de Montfort is the greatest general alive. Do you not think so?"

"So all say who understand warfare, which I do not, Diccon. But since I have seen him in his camp with my own eyes, I know him for a very noble knight. If the sacrifice of his own life might avoid this bloody conflict and set England at rest I think he would right gladly lay it down."

The sailor shrugged. "There are few with King Henry would do the same, mistress. When you went with the Captain to the Earl's pavilion did he speak of our Portsmen and their ships?"

"Chiefly he spoke of the King's army, and questioned me closely on its dispositions in Lewes and of the town's defences. Of our Portsmen he said we were loyal folk who had served England well. And, Diccon, he praised Captain Aylwin, and thanked God for the help of such as he. And he said that to

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Captain Aylwin he was entrusting a post of honour in the fight. That would be a post of danger, Dick?"

"All posts in battle are posts of danger, lady. And were it not so, methinks our Captain would quickly find one. But never fear for him! He is a very grim fighter, madame, as I have often seen."

A deep-throated, formidable growl, so close and threatening that both the travellers halted and Diccon whipped out his dagger, interrupted their talk. Next moment, from behind a fragrant thicket of flowering may that bordered the path, a great wolf hound, with bristling, shaggy neck, and crouching with bared fangs and thrashing tail, barred their progress. There came following the dog the figure of a slim young countryman, with face tanned berry-brown, and bright blue eyes glancing out roguishly from under the coarse woollen hood which made one garment with his rough sheepskin jacket. The youth's shapely legs were encased in close-fitting brown hose. He carried a small bundle belted at his waist, and save for a light staff appeared quite unarmed. He laid one hand on the bristling neck of the hound, and the brute's growls died away in its throat.

Lightfoot eyed him and his dog wrathfully, but the boy gave back a disarming smile.

"Good people, have no fear," said he. "The poor brute is harmless save to such as threaten his master. Are you from the Earl of Leicester's camp?"

"What is that to you, boy?" asked Lightfoot curtly.

"Why, nothing, master. I did but wonder to see so fair a lady come from so grim an assembly." The boy's bright eyes were fixed curiously on Rosamund.

"And how know you it is a grim assembly, jackanapes?"

"Because I have been in it, master, having a kinsman with the army."

"It is where you should be yourself, a strapping lad like you," said Diccon severely.

"I was ever timid of fighting, sir. And, by what I hear, many like your Valour are leaving the Earl of Leicester while they may."

"Curse you for an impudent knave!" cried Lightfoot

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hotly. "I do my master's bidding, which is to take this lady into safety."

The bright blue eyes in the brown face gleamed boldly up at Rosamund. "There is safety behind the walls of Rye," he shot out.

Diccon swore roundly in his astonishment, and the startled blood flamed in Rosamund's face. "Spawn of Satan, who are you?" cried the sailor.

"A poor countryman of these parts, master. Yet I can read fortunes, though I have never travelled like your Valour." The blue eyes held a strange light now.

"I have travelled! Ha! How know you that?"

"The English sun doth not so wrinkle a young man's face or burn his skin so harshly."

"So! You are observant, Master Wizard. And what if we ride to Rye?"

The boy's eyes left Lightfoot and again surveyed Rosamund, with cool, appraising gaze. "In that case I would hazard a guess"—he watched her narrowly, as he slowly brought out his words—"that the lady will find her father sound in health, though grieving sore, and that the sight of so fair a face will marvellously restore him."

At that piece of fortune-telling Rosamund Farr stared in amazement, her hand caught to her bosom. "What are you?" she cried. "It seems we have met before."

"Never in life, madame."

"Tell me, who are you!" Rosamund insisted, urging her horse a little nearer, but the youth drew quickly away with his dog, and smiled rather bitterly.

"A collector of other men's secrets, madame, as you see. Nay—come no nearer, or I loose the hound!"

Diccon Lightfoot had a crossbow slung at his back. At that threat of the boy's he thrust back his dagger, and quick as thought had a bolt fitted and aimed. "Thou devil's imp!" he roared, "be off, or by the bones of Lewinna I will send thee home by a straight and narrow way!"

At sight of the levelled shaft the youth shrank back, holding fast to his shaggy familiar, which was again growling fiercely. Having quieted the dog, he looked up, half fearful,

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half defiant. "If you shoot me," said he, with a twisted smile, "you will prevent your master from learning welcome news." He began to move away, glancing over his shoulder.

Lightfoot lowered his weapon, and called out, "My master holds no traffic with sorcery, young man."

"Nevertheless," came the answer, "I will leave word for him that she he loves is well guarded." And, calling his hound, the boy fled lightly down the pathway toward the camp.

Rosamund turned breathlessly to her companion. "Diccon, in God's name, who is that youth?"

"No honest man, madame. A King's spy, perhaps. Some saucy spark who saw you in Lewes and remembered you, as surely any man might."

"But he said we had never met, Dick!"

"Lying is easy, lady, and it is easy to draw a bow at a venture."

"But he hit the mark! Again and again he hit it."

"But had no mind to be hit himself!" laughed Diccon roughly. "Think no more of the pert rascal, mistress."

But Rosamund thought a good deal more of him all that day as they rode toward Rye over woodland and down. At night she returned to the question as they sat sharing the rude supper of a swineherd in his hut, their horses stabled in the peasant's empty woodshed.

"Diccon, that boy we met—his hands were small and white."

"I did not remark it, lady."

"But his face was darkly brown."

Lightfoot gulped down a mouthful of beans, and laughed. "Piebald spy, madame."

"And his feet were small, and he was very graceful when he ran."

Diccon eyed her curiously. "What mean you, Mistress Rosamund?"

"Dick, he knew me. He knew us both. Dick—if it were a woman!"

"Then, by the Mass, the woman was a witch. And a right bold witch she must be to enter Earl Simon's camp. For they say that next to a Jew the Earl detests a witch."

Rosamund said no more. Wearied out by the day's long

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travel, her eyes smarting with the smoke of the peasant's fire, which filled the hovel, she looked out of the open door at the silver light already lying on hill and valley, and wondered with a vague unease who that strange traveller might be who went to the Barons' camp.

Meanwhile, in that same hour at Fletching, Sir William de Blund lay within his tent, and through its raised flap watched the May moon and thought of the morrow. Here and there in the shadowed greenwood the light of a fire glowed redly; here and there figures moved among the trees, and voices came on the still air. The tranquillity of the scene gave no hint that in the dreaming woodland a great army lay concealed.

Along a glade down which de Blund was idly gazing there presently approached the figure of a friar. By his garb he seemed one of those pious, begging friars whom, a score of years before, the great St Francis had begun to send out into the world, taking poverty as their bride, to preach holy living to all men and to toil among the poor. His head was hooded; his coarse frock of serge was gathered with a rope girdle about his waist; his sandalled feet made no sound on the forest track. He was companioned by a great hound, on whose neck he kept a hand. Unchallenged by the sentries—for men were making confession to-night throughout the host in readiness for the morrow's bloodshed—he drew near the young knight's tent. De Blund rose to his feet and stepped to the tent door, and the moonlight shone on his keen young face.

The friar stopped a moment, then came on into the tent. "I seek Sir William de Blund," he said, in a thin voice.

"I am he, and shriven this hour. What seek you further, friar?"

"And the prisoners in your charge, Sir William—are they also shriven?"

The young man grinned contemptuously in the faint rushlight which glimmered within the tent. "Three fat old greybeard traitors, soft-bodied and rich," said he. "Aldermen of London city. Holy sir, such do not ride to battle."

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"Yet they too need shriving, my son."

The knight stood puzzled. It seemed to him he had heard that strangely light and pleasing voice before.

"Inasmuch as they are grievous sinners, I am with you," said he, to indulge his curiosity. "But inasmuch as they are in no peril of battle, their need is not pressing. Moreover," he laughed, "the paunchy rascals are even now doing penance for their sin."

"And do you know their sin?"

"Who does not? All know how the double-faced villains, when last our great Earl came to London, concerted to betray him to his enemies. And who knows better than I, who was by his side when they closed the bridge against him, by how narrow a miracle he escaped that treachery! But Leicester's arm is long, friar. We have those sly old traitors safely caged, and wheresoever the Earl marches now they follow in his train for a laughing-stock and a warning."

"And the cage," said the friar, "is it not Earl Simon's own litter, which was made for him when he was lamed by a fall from his horse?"

"It is the same," de Blund answered, "save that we have fastened an iron framework on it with a lock and key. A noble fox-trap, holy sir, and as it swings between the sumpter horses it shakes up the old foxes, I warrant you, and makes them growl in their whiskers!"

"And do they sleep in the cage?"

"Faith, no! We are not Turks," Sir William laughed. "At night we hobble the fellows like horses, and they lie on the grass among the guards. And now, friar, you shall tell me your business."

There was no answer from the shrouded figure. De Blund took a quick stride, and snatched away the hood. The great hound sprang at him with a ferocious snarl, his snapping jaws missing the knight's arm by an inch as the friar threw his whole weight on the brute's collar. "Down, Wolf, down!" came the imperious treble command as the dog slunk growling back, and suddenly de Blund saw that the friar was no friar. The head from which he had so roughly torn the grey hood, and the boy's cap that had fallen back

with the hood, was crowned with fair bright hair, which tumbled in confusion over the grey habit. The eyes of the knight, as he recoiled from the angry dog, flashed amazed recognition.

"Adela! In God's name how came you here—and with the password?"

She turned a flaming face to him. "Am I not of Sussex? Think you I have no friends in Sussex—ay, even in your traitor Earl's own camp? William, Dycard is my uncle. I beseech you, free him."

"I cannot," answered de Blund shortly and sternly to her pleading eyes.

"It was not thus you spoke when you came to Udimore," said she. "If my uncle served the King, why should you call him traitor?" She dropped the friar's robe to the ground, and stood before him in her boy's dress, lovely and defiant. "It is your Earl and you who are the traitors," said she.

"Simon de Montfort is England's saviour," answered the young enthusiast. "We will not talk of him or of your uncle, but of you. If it were known you were in the camp it would go hard with you, Adela. Go quickly, as you have come."

"That can I do. But I would not go alone, William." She took a step toward him in the shadowed tent. There was an infinite sorcery in her beauty. "Every day since you have camped here in Fletching Forest men have been leaving your Earl and returning to their allegiance," she murmured. "The King and Prince Edward deal kindly with such knights. You used to vow you loved me, Will."

"And ever shall, to my cost!" he cried bitterly. "Yet I was one of many, Adela, and there was another of my name more fortunate than I."

"William"—she laid a coaxing hand upon his arm—"is Adela of Udimore so poor a pleader? Did you ever hear I was a witch, Will?"

"My ears have heard it, and my soul knows it well," said he, with eyes yearning upon her. "Yet to-night I must withstand your spells. My honour is pledged to the Earl of Leicester for the liberties of England."

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"Bah!" With an impatient exclamation the temptress turned aside. "Witch or no, to-night I read your fate. Release my uncle, call your folk, and come with me, and you are saved, and a made man. Stay here, and your worshipped Earl hath condemned you to death."

De Blund started. "What mean you, Adela?"

"I have touched you, O faithful knight! Have you not been charged, you and your folk, with the guarding of these three old men in Leicester's iron litter?"

"And what then?"

"Until this present march from London hath not Earl Simon travelled everywhere in his litter, and have not all men, since his late mishap, believed him too lame to sit his horse?"

"He has ridden again these several weeks. But what then?" said the knight, wondering not only at her knowledge but to what all this might tend.

"Your force is small, William."

"It may be."

"What all men have believed till now, think you not the King and his host may believe still?"

"It may be. I have not thought of it, Adela."

"Fool! But your Earl has. To-morrow, when Earl Simon sets his battle—oh, I know that you march to-morrow—I will tell you what he will do. He will place the cage where all may see it. The King's knights will vie with each other to reach and slay the man whom of all men King Henry and his son hate the most. Meanwhile your subtle Earl will fall with his main battle upon the King's army. I say your Earl has doomed you!"

De Blund stood staring at her aghast. He knew that at least in part she spoke truth, for from de Montfort's own lips he had that day taken the orders for the guarding of his standard. But that the order could have become known already staggered him. Treachery must indeed be rife in the Earl's camp. His fresh young face hardened.

"The King's spies serve him well," said he. And yet with her melting blue eyes upon him a note of gentleness crept into his bitter words.

"Life is sweet, Will," said she.

"Verily, dear, at times," he answered. "And yet I tell thee I would liefer die fighting beside Earl Simon than live to triumph with the King over the freedom of Englishmen."

Adela's lip curled. "Your Earl hath a docile pupil," said she. "Then you refuse me utterly?"

"I will not be forsworn," he answered, his voice harsh with trouble.

"Then I go as I came," said she, beginning to put on again her Franciscan's dress. "Farewell, William, and forget not that I warned you."

But now de Blund barred her exit, standing in the doorway of his tent.

"Adela, it is too late. The Earl marches at dawn. Since you have learned what you have learned, you must remain in the camp."

She flashed at him a look of scorn. "To be delivered as a spy to the mercy of Leicester! Oh, it is true enough. These three days I have explored your Earl's camp, and carried word to Lewes of your dispositions, and more than one good knight I have turned back from you to the King."

"God! You have been in Lewes, Adela! And young Warrene——" He hesitated.

She gave him a scornful laugh. "And young Warrene, you would say, flaunting his new mistress before my jealous eyes. The poor fool knows not I was in his father's town. And now he has lost his precious toy, snatched from his very arms by her lover, the Rye sea-captain. A merry tale for minstrels, William! I heard it in the King's camp ere I left this morning. A proper man, by the Mass, that captain of yours!"

"If he meet Lord William to-morrow," said de Blund, "one of them will die."

"We must all die some time," she answered coldly. "So now take Adela to Earl Simon and let him hang her."

"Never, by heaven!" cried the young man. "But you must be safely held till your news is no longer dangerous for England."

"And who will hold the witch safe? Will you, William? I might cast spells upon you in the night!"

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"You might, indeed!" he confessed, and stood considering her. "But now I bethink me, there is one with me upon whom your beauty, Adela, will work in vain, so deeply is he bewitched by another."

He did not notice her sudden pallor, or the strange gleam in her blue eyes, but heard only her mocking question: "And who is this safe and faithful lover, William?"

"Cover your face, and you shall see him. His name is Garth Aylwin, the sea-captain of Rye." Then he led her unresisting from his tent, and presently they stood within another.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN AYLWIN'S PRISONER

GARTH AYLWIN, roused from sleep, stood glowering at the three who had come to him out of the night: the commander whose division he was to guide on the march, the friar, and the great dog that stood between them.

"Captain," said de Blund, his voice sounding strange, "I bring you a prisoner."

"Am I a gaoler?" demanded Aylwin.

"For to-night only. There is none other I can trust for this. This friar is one to whom no harm must come, yet who hath such perilous knowledge of our plans that were he free to-night to-morrow might spell disaster for us all. I charge you, as you are a loyal man, guard him well till the army marches at daybreak: then send him in safe custody to Udimore."

At the name of Udimore Captain Aylwin gave so violent a start that only the gloom of his tent concealed it. Then he mastered himself, and said coldly, "I am a plain man, Sir William, with no love for mysteries. Who is this friar?"

"Why, that you must ask him, though whether he will answer I know not. It is enough that he must be safely guarded, and that you are a faithful man to our lord, Earl Simon."

"When I joined myself to the Earl it was not for the guarding of prisoners, Sir William."

"Fie on thee, man! There will be more of that yet for us both. His Grace ordains that you march with us in the morning, to help me watch the London aldermen. Captain Aylwin, I am your officer; you will not refuse obedience?"

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Captain Aylwin saluted stiffly. "It is your order that the friar remain in my tent till dawn?"

"My order, and my responsibility."

"And that at dawn I send him under escort to Udimore?"

"Mounted, with mounted men. I will send them to you."

"And do I house also the friar's dog, Sir William?"

De Blund laughed. "As to that, I care not. Captain, there is more in this than appears. If the friar keeps silence respect his silence. If he speaks, it may be you will respect him the less, but, speechless or speaking, guard him well. To-morrow's battle may hang upon your care."

"You shall not complain of me, Sir William."

"I trust you, Captain. Farewell till dawn."

De Blund withdrew. Captain Aylwin, baring his sword, sat down in the entrance of his tent, his back to the moon-light without. The friar and the dog stood where the knight had left them, two grey figures in the half-light. Presently the great dog, uneasy at the stillness, whimpered.

"Friar," said Aylwin, in a low voice, "you have learned to travel on rough paths since we parted."

"All paths are rough in England now," she answered, equally low. "Then you know me, Captain?"

"When de Blund said Udimore, I knew you. It seems Fate drives us together."

"This morning I saw your Rosamund," said Adela. "She rode in safety on the road for Rye. Would to God I had not parted you! She has a noble air."

"You saw her?" exclaimed Garth eagerly. "How knew you it was she?"

"From your own lips, husband," said Adela, with a wry smile in the darkness. "You drew her truly enough in your ravings. Moreover, I was this morning also in Lewes, and heard there of your prowess at the Priory."

"It was your ring-shirt that saved me," said Garth. "It seems I must owe you my life. But for that you would now be free. Why did you send it, Adela?"

"Perhaps I liked not to think of my nurse-work being too soon undone. How you hate me, Captain Aylwin!"

Captain Hylwin's Prisoner

"No. I cannot hate you. But I hate the net in which you have enmeshed me, and, by God's grace, I will break it."

"Then break it now!" cried she. "Take me to de Montfort. Say 'Here is King Henry's spy,' and you are freed."

"My orders run otherwise," he answered. "Why have you come to Leicester's camp?"

"May not a wife come to see her husband?" she demanded. "In Lewes they gave me this monk's disguise—taking a lesson from you! I do assure you, even on the verge of battle, the town rings with your exploit."

"Where have you seen Rosamund?"

"How you fasten on that! She is well on her way, if she be not by now in her father's town."

"But she knows you not, nor do you know her."

"How should she know me, who had never before seen me? She saw me thus." Adela dropped the friar's robe and threw back the cowl. "Do you not think me a taking boy, Captain?"

"Describe her, that I may know you saw her."

"Well, she is very lovely, yet not, I think, more lovely than your wife. Her eyes are blackly grey, and her hair is black and abundant. I am the golden cornfield, Garth, ripe under the hot blue sky, but she is the cool, deep forest, full of a secret power."

"Now I know you have seen her."

"And I that she holds you, though the Church gave you to me. Hey, if I could hold my lover as surely as she holds you!"

"The Church shall yet give both of us our freedom," said Garth.

"The Church or the sword—I wonder!" She stood and looked at him, then approached, and with her fingers touched his dull ring-mail, and smiled sadly. "I should desire your death," said she, "for, fond fool that I am, Garth, I cannot tear my heart from that William of Warenne whom I should scorn for his lightness and you would kill for vengeance. But since I have once preserved you alive, I would continue my work. See this great dog here, this Wolf of mine, from my

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woods of Udimore. He is a fierce and faithful friend. Take him with you to the battle."

"Why?"

"Believe me, when the trumpets sound, they will press you hard. I say what I know. Sir William de Blund knows too. Take the hound, and at the worst he may aid you when all else fails. He will stay by you to the death."

"And if I will not take him?"

"Why, then you may never see Rosamund of Rye again. It will be a grim battle, and you fight a lost cause."

Despite the harm she had done him, Aylwin was touched.

"Adela," said he, gently, "I have heard men speak very evilly of you. If I live none shall ever so speak again while I can give them the lie."

"Why, that is kind of you." The Lady of Udimore laughed lightly. "Give me your hand—oh, have no fear! I will but lay it on the head of this brave brute who is to go with you."

Garth put his hand out obediently, and she called the hound and laid the hand on its rough head. "A wedding-gift, Captain," she smiled. "One that will serve you well. So! Now keep him by you. Stay there, Wolf, I say! Suffer him to run beside my uncle's litter, for he knows him well. Let him stand with you in the fight. He has the sense of a man and the heart of a lion. He will never fail you while breath is in him. Wolf, good dog, protect this warrior!"

For the rest of that strange night which they spent together in the tent she would not let the dog return to her side, but made him remain always with Garth. When the first faint light showed in the east the camp began to stir. There came a sound of approaching hoofs.

Garth looked out of the tent door. "It is time," said he. "Put on your friar's gear."

Adela put a hand upon his arm. "We may never meet again," said she. "Say that you forgive me for entrapping you."

"I forgive you," he answered, "but I will break the trap, if God wills."

"Then seal my pardon with a kiss."

He kissed her, and she considered him with thoughtful eyes. "You kiss very grimly," said she, with a smile. "God keep you and Earl Warrenne's son apart!" She took up her disguise and donned it.

"If Lord William lay in your power, would you spare him for my prayers?"

Garth stiffened at that. "Since Rosamund is secure, I must remember you have bought my enemy's life with mine. But if de Warrenne come again to Rye——Cover your hair, Lady Adela. Here come your guards!"

A few moments later he handed over the grey-robed figure to two stalwart foresters, and stood to watch the three ride down the glade. The great dog, Wolf, remained whimpering at his side.

CHAPTER XIV

MOUNT HARRY'S CHRISTENING

NEVER was great army led more craftily through tangled forest-ways than the host which Earl Simon de Montfort conducted from Fletching down upon Lewes. By a score of paths they set forth in the dim dawn, each knight and man marked on breast and back with a white cross, that they might know each other in the fratricidal battle and be reminded of the rightness of their cause, each banneret so well instructed how to lead his force that he went straight to the appointed rendezvous.

The host, horse and foot, all wet with the early dew, converged like a moving forest of steel, all glittering in the newly risen sun, into the Coombe valley, where the green shoulders of the Downs might cover their march upon the town. Swiftly down the valley, line upon line, rode the steel-clad barons of England behind the people's champion—"that magnificent man," as old Matthew Paris calls him, "the Earl Simon, constant in word, severe in face, most faithful of all."

Suddenly, small with the distance, but crystal clear in the level morning beams, the foremost riders beheld the bell-tower of the Priory come in view. At that sight the leader reined in his great war-horse, and halted his knights with outstretched arm. The tramping thousands halted too, and to the full murmur of a marching host succeeded a strange, expectant silence. The great figure in their van had turned to face them. His visor was up, and in the dark frame of his crested helmet his hawk-like eyes gleamed, lighting the swarthy features, with the high, prominent nose, with a fire of fanatical enthusiasm. He handed to his squire his heavy

lance and the triangular blood-red shield with its device of the raging white lion with double tail. Then, rising in his stirrups, he hailed the army in a voice like a trumpet-call

"He that loves God and his land let him do now as I do, making of his body a living cross this day, whereon if need be the sorrows of England may be atoned. God defend the right!" With that word the Earl sprang from his horse and flung himself face downwards on the turf, his arms outspread, his legs together, in imitation of the sacred sign.

With one accord his barons did likewise, and after them their men—as strange a sight as war has ever seen. Then, rising, the troops, horse and foot, moved westerly, to occupy the undefended heights from which de Montfort had planned to hurl his knights upon the royal forces, already surprised after a night of revelry by the swiftness of his march

A party of foragers, making an early raid from the town, had been set upon by the vanguard of the Barons, but one or two of their number had escaped, and fled wildly to spread the alarm in Lewes.

Captain Garth Aylwin, riding with the great dog Wolf beside him, had guided the force of Sir William de Blund through the forest, and now looked wonderingly out from the crest of the hills at the novel scene about him. Many lesser fights had he seen and shared in, but never the marshalling of a great battle, and his breath came quick as he gazed. Immediately behind him, in the midst of a square of mounted knights and bowmen, and pikemen tramping on foot, came the sumpter-beasts bearing the main baggage of the army: folded tents and bales of food-stuffs, casks of liquor, spare weapons by hundreds, armourers and their gear. In the centre of all, close ringed by men-at-arms, two great horses carried slung between them the ornamented iron cage in which the traitor London aldermen lay imprisoned, and beside the cage was borne a tall gilded staff from which the white lion standard of Leicester fluttered to the downland breeze.

Spread below, at the foot of more than a mile of turf slopes, lay in a great panorama the town of Lewes and its approaches and the camp of the royal army. North, east,

and south wound the wide estuary of Ouse. On the nearby slopes Earl Simon's men, horse and foot, were forming their lines, each great lord's banner flying over his feudal array. The army stood ranged on three projecting spurs of the hills, its divisions sundered from each other by deep hollows, but all moving slowly toward the town. To the north, along a declivity which ended close under the walls where the castle frowned, with the chequered blue and gold banner of the de Warennes floating from its keeps, were placed the Londoners, zealous but undisciplined partisans, who eagerly claimed the honour of the foremost station. Their leader was Nicholas de Segrave, whose zeal in Simon's cause had earned him a special excommunication. He was almost the sole notable survivor of the massacre at Northampton, which he burned to avenge. Over the heads of his eager citizen rabble rustled his banner of a silver lion crowned with gold.

In the centre of the Barons' line, on a slope which ran uninterruptedly down into the town, stood ranged a great force of knights under Gilbert de Clare, the young Earl of Gloucester, who, though married to the King's niece, had caught some glow of his great leader's zeal and had thrown in his lot on the side of freedom.

On the right wing Earl Simon's two sons, Henry and Guy, held command, while in a group apart the great Earl himself, mainspring of these moving powers, held in reserve a shining thicket of chosen lances, so placed as to give him view of all the rest, and strong enough to hurl a decisive shock to turn the hesitating tide of battle.

Upon all this fateful assemblage Captain Garth Aylwin gazed with observant eye and blood tingling in his veins as he rode in his forester's dress beside his leader. In a few hours, on these bosoming slopes, the fate of a nation would lie written in letters of blood. The fate, too, of Rosamund, the fate of Rye, his own fate, and of how many thousands more of those kindred, high and low, who faced each other across the intervening turf! How many who had seen the sunrise that bright May morn would see its setting?

An order, suddenly shouted, put an end to his reflections.

Mount Harry's Christening

Sir William de Blund was halting his miscellaneous array on the highest point of the hill. The beasts were unladen, tents were pitched, the banner of Earl Simon was displayed on a rising mound, and the ranks began to form in order. Back and forth along the line rode the young leader, watchful of everything, though the look on his manly, open face was set and strained. As he passed Garth rode up to him, the great dog Wolf at his horse's heels.

"By your leave, Sir William, since I have guided you hither, I seek permission to join the main battle. Meseems there will be little fighting here."

De Blund frowned. "Captain Aylwin, I presume not to teach you navigation, but this I know: that in every ship there is one who orders, while the rest obey, lest the tempest overwhelm them. It has pleased Lord Simon to set me here with all my force, and here by God's help I stay, and they with me, till other order cometh."

"Methinks it is a post of little honour," grumbled Garth, "with fifteen thousand citizens holding the left flank below us."

The young knight turned on him fiercely. "Is this the Earl of Leicester's battle or thine?"

The sailor shrugged, abashed. "I think it is England's battle, sir. I did but hope to strike a blow or two. But I can obey as well as another."

"Then stand fast by the standard, beside the prisoners' cage. There are good men there, as hot for battle as you. It may be death will not forget you, Aylwin."

Stung by the taunting tone, but obedient to the discipline of the field, Garth turned to range himself with the guards about the banner. He had thought to find a band of pikemen, but to his surprise a little cluster of knights sat there in full mail.

By now the whole green ridge was alive with marching men: knights in casque and mail-coat, men-at-arms in leathern jackets, brown-faced yeomen in coats and hoods of green, with the good bows in their hands. In the wide and shallow hollow where de Warenne's township lay King Henry and the ardent Prince were mustering their battle. The

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sunbeams glittered on a thousand points of steel. Pennons fluttered from the lances of the knights; gay silken trappings covered the armoured breasts and flanks of many a war-horse; many a courtier wore his brodered cloak above his mail-shirt; on the riders' shields in both armies a thousand devices gleamed in gold and silver, in blue and green and crimson.

Behind the King's army, as it formed in the haste of surprise, fires blazed and smoke rolled up at several points along the town's outworks, where the Earl of Leicester's adventurous scouts had sought to throw the enemy into panic.

As the three divisions of the Barons' army in front of them surged down from the high levels upon the Royalists, de Blund came galloping along his front of guards. "Stand fast! Stand fast all!" he cried, for the line of his knights was sagging forward with the instinctive movement of the horses to follow the advance.

To the right of the shouting Londoners the Earl of Gloucester led the van. On his right again, beyond an intervening coombe, young Henry and Guy de Montfort thrust forward with their father's right. In the rear of his centre the patriot Earl watched with his fourth division in reserve.

A knight, sternly ordered back by de Blund, swore deeply behind his visor. "Must we stand here like blocks of wood," he growled, "while England is made bond or free? Army for army they face us, Sir William, and army for army they outnumber us by far. Look you, the Prince himself takes the field against our London levies. He hates them for their insults to his mother."

"Stand fast!" shouted de Blund in answer. "It is Lord Simon's strait command."

Some way below the noisy citizens Prince Edward's knights moved forward up the slope in a grim wall of steel. Left of them, in a dense mass of horse and foot, the King's main body crowded about the royal standard of red samite, brodered with gold. Left of these again, the King of the Romans led the Royalist left.

Mount Harry's Christening

"The sun is in our fellows' eyes," grumbled the discontented knight.

"Yet we fight downhill," answered de Blund.

There came a sudden fierce blare of trumpets sounding the charge. The turf shook to the dull thunder of hoofs as with a clamour of wild war-cries the fifteen thousand Londoners hurled their full shock upon the Prince's iron line. The Prince's knights, flower of the royal army, met them at the gallop. The crash of contact rolled along the Downs. Followed the furious din of battle: screams of men and horses stricken, shattering of iron on iron, shout and counter-shout, sharp cracks of splintering lances, the ceaseless undertone of thudding hoofs. A little while the struggling tide swayed doubtfully, as the Prince's line bent to the fury of the onslaught. Then discipline rallied the sagging ranks, and in a shining avalanche of steel the Prince's riders shore through the broken thousands of the citizens.

"Segrave's standard is down!" shouted de Blund suddenly. "Stand to it now, for our turn comes quickly!"

The Londoners, overborne by that stern onslaught, lost all cohesion. Their shattered ranks fled in a mad confusion, the Prince and his exultant knights pressing them hard in pursuit, piercing, cutting down, overriding hundreds as they urged their panting, snorting horses up the rise of the turf.

Full in the path of the routed citizens, and a bare half-mile behind, de Blund's little force waited round the standard of Earl Simon, the prisoners, and the baggage. De Blund closed his visor, and swiftly, as the thundering hoofs came on, drew tighter about the prisoners' litter his few hundred axemen and his handful of knights. Yet he snatched a moment to lean toward Captain Aylwin as he rode the last time down his line, and from behind his helmet bars his careless voice rang mockingly: "How now, my fire-eating navigator! If we rally not these frightened sheep you will never make port again!"

The rout swept toward them, a tempest of shouting and slaughter. As they reached de Blund's steady line the panic-stricken citizens swerved to left and right, though a

few, more courageous, took the chance to re-form. For the moment the pursuers drew rein, and a cloud of shafts from de Blund's bowmen took toll. Profiting by the momentary diversion, de Blund sounded the onset, and charged with all his knights, only to be flung back from the grim line with half his saddles empty.

Then among the enemy ranks a rider, straight as an arrow in his seat, with a golden leopard on his shield, raised his visor for a moment and showed the fair, handsome, eager face of the King's son, flushed with passion and triumph.

"Look all!" he shouted to his knights. "There is the arch-traitor's banner, and his carriage, his iron cage in which the dog hides from punishment. Come forth, Simon, thou devil! Forth, thou worst of traitors! On, St George!"

With a mighty shout, lances in rest, the steel line swept forward. De Blund and his knights reeled to the shock, were overthrown, fighting desperately. Desperately, too, the axemen fought, and for a few minutes longer held back the Prince and his men. Garth Aylwin, pressed back close to the litter, was flung from his rearing horse, found himself unhurt on the sward, and, getting to his feet, looked round for the sword he had lost in the fall. He saw no sword, but he saw a Royalist making at him with levelled lance. Snatching an axe from a dead man at his feet, he hurled it with all his strength, so that it smashed straight into the visor-bars of the rider, who toppled from his saddle. As he fell, beside him Garth saw that which lent him for a moment a force beyond his own. In the fore-front of the attack blazed the Prince's shield with the golden leopard, and round their fiery leader rode an eager group, their steel-breasted horses plunging wildly as they bore down the last resistance about the cage. The helmet of one of the knights, broken from its fastenings, hung flapping at the wearer's neck, and the face of the knight, bloody but exultant, was the face of William of Warenne.

The knight whom Aylwin's lucky blow had felled lay dying at his feet, while his freed horse bolted into the confusion of the fight. Snatching the fallen man's sword from its belt, the sailor whirled the shining blade about him,

Mount Barry's Christening

clearing for the moment a little space by the sheer fury of his blows. A red mist swam before his eyes. As he struck and struck again he shouted into the tempestuous din, not knowing what he shouted. Yet such was the turmoil of shouting men and screaming horses, the hammer of beating iron, and the thunder of hoofs around the last stand of de Blund's surviving guards that the sailor's masterful bellow scarce sounded above the uproar. Leaping between the charging horses, reckless of all but that exultant face, Garth rushed on his enemy, who was attacking an axeman with his mace. Swinging aside and spurring as this new assailant leaped at him, de Warenne escaped the main force of the blow, which, glancing from shoulder to arm, struck the mace from his grip, while his plunging horse bore him clear. Garth turned to follow furiously, heedless of the foes now thronging on all sides.

He had a moment's vision of the last defenders falling round the carriage, a glimpse of a scared old bearded face which peered out from the opening of the cage, and of lances thrust ruthlessly through, and thrust and thrust again. Then a stunning blow from behind on his leathern forester's cap laid him senseless as the victors swept forward.

CHAPTER XV

NIGHT IN LEWES TOWN

WHEN Captain Aylwin opened his eyes again to life he knew he must have lain a great while senseless. For the summer daylight was fading, and a pale moon looked down on him through a lacework of boughs. Dimly he perceived beside him in the shadows a figure in shaggy sheepskin that sat watching him, hunched on the ground with hands clasped round knees. A thin ray of moonlight touched the blade of a long knife which lay on the turf close by.

Still half-dazed, the skipper of the *Royal Richard* lay and stared like one newly emerged from some horrid dream. What of that gloaming march through the forest, that vision of the Priory towers at sunrise, that bitter fight upon the Down?

As he stared the watching face under the woollen hood grew familiar, bent nearer. He caught his breath.

"Adela! Is this witchcraft?"

She held up a warning finger. He saw tears in the blue eyes. "The vultures of battle are about on the hill; stripping the dead and the maimed," she murmured.

He saw then that they were in the cover of a little clump of dwarf elm, ringed round with the yellow gorse that blooms all the year through on the Downs. For they say "When the gorse is out of bloom, then love is out of season."

He sat up dizzily. "I sent you under guard to Udimore," said he.

She gave a wan smile. "I did not go so far. You should have sent older men. I sent them back—to their death, I think. Dear God! How dreadful a thing is battle!"

Garth got unsteadily to his feet, reeled, and sank down

again. But in that moment he had caught a glimpse of the hillside, dotted with bodies as far as eye could reach.

"In God's name, how came you here?" he faltered.

"Since I am here, what matters it?"

Aylwin lay thinking dully, but could spare her no more wonder. "Is the Earl of Leicester slain?" he asked her at length.

"The Earl of Leicester has won a great victory," said the Lady Adela. "God knows what it portends, but the King and his son, and many chiefs of the King's army, are prisoners in Earl Simon's hands, and many thousand men are dead, and the great Priory burns to heaven."

Captain Aylwin put his hand to his aching head. He was faint and dizzy. "How can that be?" he asked. "I myself saw Segrave's Londoners scatter like sheep before the Prince's knights. The rout swept up past us, the Prince's horsemen killing without mercy. We held some hundreds for a little, the Prince himself among them, about the Earl's standard, but they rode us down, I think."

Adela nodded. "De Blund is dead, and most that were with him. You would be dead too but that the poor hound's carcass lay over you. And my uncle, with the other prisoners of the cage, all dead!"

"And nevertheless you say the King is taken?"

"He is taken. The Prince, believing Earl Simon with his banners, rode straight to attack him after breaking the citizens. Your wily Earl would have loosed his own men on the Prince's flank, but the King's main body fell so fiercely upon your rebel right and centre that de Montfort, to avert ruin, thrust in there with all his reserve. Oh, Captain, the slopes lie covered with dead—I think there must be twenty thousand slain—and everywhere is groaning, and broken armour, and men and horses mangled. The father has not spared the son, nor the son the father." She sat shivering in the shadowed hiding-place.

"And the King? What of the King?"

"They say the King, riding his great war-horse, fought like a very lion. Two horses were killed under him, and he was sore wounded when they took him. As for the Prince,

four miles he pursued the citizens in his rage, and the long trail of their dead lies along the heights. Twilight was falling when the Prince with tired horses returned from the butchery. The Earl Warenne still flew his banner from the castle-keeps, but the town was full of the King's men in flight and the Earl's men pursuing."

"And how know you all this?"

Adela shuddered anew. "It was at that time I was trying to make my way through the town to find my uncle's body, and perhaps my lover's, and perhaps yours. Oh, man, your wife is no coward! Men were so mingled in the streets they slew each other for lack of knowing who they were. The alleys were filled with wounded men groaning, and the gutters ran blood and mire. Loose horses of the slain wandered in the gloom, and trampled on the living. Houses spouted flame and smoke where the soldiers had set them on fire. And down by the Priory walls the sky was red with a great glare where the Earl of Leicester's men had fired the Priory to smoke out the King. When the Prince found how the day had gone, and that the Earl had all in his hands, he gave himself up. Mother of Christ! what will be the end!"

Aylwin sat wide-eyed at this news. "The end will be that England will be saved," he said slowly at last, "and the freedom which men won at Runnymede from the King's father will be for ever confirmed. God save the Earl of Leicester!"

"If you speak so loudly," cautioned Adela, "the robbers of the dead, who scour the hills, will hear, and kill us both."

She gave him drink from a skin bottle and food from a wallet. At sight of the strengthening life in him she smiled queerly. "I think my husband's head must be as thick as his love for his wife is thin," said she. "Such a dint as you got would kill most men. To-night you can lie here, and to-morrow"—the boy-girl's shoulders shrugged a little scornfully under the sheepskin—"go and join your magic Earl."

But now Garth got to his feet again. "If it be as you say, the Earl needs me no longer, Adela, and I go to my

affairs." His glance fell on a sword, which she had found and laid beside him on the turf, and he stooped and secured it, though the movement shot pain like a stab through his bruised head.

"There is much to do. Farewell, and God reward your pity, Adela." He moved away.

"Are you mad?" her voice followed him. "The robbers of the dead will kill you. Come back!"

But Garth staggered on. Down the hillside under the brightening moon, past still figures of men and horses slain and writhing shapes that called piteously to him as he went. His head swam, and he had lost blood, but he was whole of limb, and though he swayed unsteadily he made way toward the lower ground. Often he saw ghoulisn shapes, ragged and horrible, that crouched over the body of some dead man, despoiling him. Of these, some fled as he drew near, others approached him threateningly, to slink back at sight of the naked steel in his hand.

Right before him, as he went on down the slope of turf, loomed the black mass of the castle, its two keeps towering darkly against the pale sky, but the outer walls of the enclosure and the barbican standing as it were knee-deep in leaping flames. Lurid tongues of orange and yellow glowed and danced against the grim stones, and from the conflagration great banks of smoke rolled upward and outward, now obscuring the castle altogether, now engulfing its lower parts in a fire-shot mist, above which the higher towers swam clear like mountain peaks over cloud.

Captain Aylwin overtook a poor maimed wretch dragging himself by painful inches toward the town.

"Save you, comrade," said he. "Have they set fire to the Earl's castle?"

"Would God they had!" the wounded man answered. "For then the land would smell the cleaner. It is the Earl Warenne's men in the castle, who have shot Greek fire upon the town to drive off the attackers. Forester, for Christ's sake, give me a drink!"

"Alas! I have none," answered Aylwin. He was moving on, but the dog-like appeal in the wounded wretch's eyes

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held him, and he noted the white cross of Leicester's army on the man's leathern jacket. "What is your hurt?" he asked.

"An arrow buried in the thigh. And then the Prince's riders—may hell devour them!—rode over me as they returned an hour since. All day I have lain on the hill, and I thirst—dear God, how I thirst!"

Aylwin bent over him. "The Prince's riders? Longshanks?"

"Aye."

"See, comrade, I will seek water for you, and you shall tell me more."

He searched about, turning over perhaps a dozen bodies ere he found what he sought—a wineskin still holding a little liquor at the saddlebow of a dead horse. The wounded man emptied it at one fierce gulp. "Our lord St Peter reward you at the door of heaven!" he exclaimed.

"Reward me now, comrade. Tell me of Longshanks and his men."

"It was falling dusk, and the battle mostly over. We had driven the King himself before us, all bloody and wounded among the last of the knights, and our fellows were pressing after the King to the Priory. I was limping towards the town with many others in like case——"

"But the Prince, man! The Prince!"

"Aye, the Prince—curse him! There was a shouting from the hill behind us, and Longshanks and his riders, all journey-bated from long riding, and bloody as butchers from helm to spur, came down like a pack of fiends. Their horses were spent, but they were spurring hard, for they had learned the King's plight as they came over the Down. There were some that rocked in the saddle for weariness, yet they rode like devils, and howled for more blood as they rode. Where they saw a white cross on a man's shoulder they drove their dripping lances home again. I crawled among a score of dead, and they rode over."

"And so to the Priory?"

"Where else? The castle was close beset by Earl Simon. At the Priory the King's knights had turned to bay, and

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might still be aided. I know no more, forester. Take a dying man's thanks, for I shall never reach Lewes."

The sailor left him, and came at last to the town. It was very grim and dreadful there among the timbered houses in the pent and narrow ways. Dark shapes of gables and overhanging roofs were blackly outlined against the lurid glare which filled the sky from the district round the castle, where the flames were roaring. As Garth made his uncertain way through the shadows toward the Priory he tempted Fate often, for all down the twisted streets there poured in a mighty confusion fleeing Royalists and their pursuers, and wounded men lay moaning and crying in the gloom, trampled on by friend and foe alike, and riderless horses ran panic-stricken in the dark. Here and there a fugitive knight turned desperately at bay at some temporary vantage-point, sometimes to be hurled from the saddle and either taken or done to death where he fell, sometimes gaining brief respite by a lucky blow, and plunging on with his floundering horse in the hope to reach the river bridge.

At last Garth came through to the outskirts again, and saw the Priory before him. The sight brought him to a stand, and he crouched exhausted under the low eaves of a house near the rude enclosure which ran round the town.

In front, as behind him, the sky was red with conflagration. From behind the Priory walls themselves a great fire was blazing, and the space between town and Priory was filled with a rout of flying figures on horseback and afoot, racing for life toward the town, with the white crosses of the Barons' men in hot pursuit. To venture into that stampeding mob was to court destruction.

Nevertheless, as Aylwin crouched, watching, there presently came a momentary damming of the stampede. From townward and castleward, whence he had so lately made his own way, rode down a clanking band of knights, some thirty strong. Formed like a wedge, they rode close-packed and slowly, horse and man as fully armed as the fortune of battle had left them, each knight with his long sword bare in his hand and his dented shield on his left arm. The ruddy glare from the Priory shone on their stained and

dusty mail, on split and loosened breastplates, on gaping brassarts and shattered greaves. They attacked none as they rode, but so compact and grim was their iron wedge in the midst of the scattered throng that the rout, both friend and foe, ebbed to right and left of them. Some rode bare-headed, their helmets gone, and the faces thus exposed were haggard and bleak.

As they approached the spot where the sailor lay the battered phalanx swung a little aside from the fugitive stream, and to his dismay Garth watched them rein up their weary horses behind the same building, like men taking shelter under a rick from the fury of a storm.

He shrank yet closer into the blackness under the eaves, and then suddenly stiffened, and gripped his own sword more tightly. For at the very head of the wedge, on a huge and powerful mount, sat a burly, steel-clad figure bearing on his shield, all chipped and hacked, the blue and gold chess-board device of Warenne. At a sign from this terrible Earl one of his riders joined him a few paces in advance of the troop—an unhelmed knight, black-haired and black-eyed, disfigured with dust and blood, in whom, nevertheless, Aylwin easily recognized Sir William. Father and son talked together in low, tense tones, and Garth, lying like a dead man, listened.

He heard the Earl speak, his voice harsh and thick through his visor-bars. "Take your choice, boy. Forward, and die unprofitably. Backward, and live to fight again." They talked in the Norman-French of their caste.

The younger man began, "The Prince said——" but his father cut him short impatiently.

"*Mort Dieu!* What matters what Longshanks said? A thousand men, fed and fresh, might make a rescue even now and turn the day. But thirty knights, dog-weary—it were mere suicide."

"I admit it, my lord." Through his matted black hair Sir William glowered at the thronging fugitives. "What remains?"

"France, boy, and quickly, while our heads sit on our shoulders. From to-night de Montfort is King in England."

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His son gave a mirthless laugh. "A thorny crown, sir, that may yet tear his traitor head!"

"And will, by God!" growled the Earl's deep voice, "when we have gathered a few stout thorns from France to add to his garland. Come, we must ride for it. And the saints send us a ship!"

"Where shall we ride, sir?"

"Why, to the nearest port, fool! Ha! Leicester will tear his hair when Lewes Castle opens its gates and de Warenne is not there."

"But bethink, Father—it is hours since the battle turned against King Henry. We are almost the last. Every man of the King's who has a head to lose is spurring for the coast. In all the nearer ports our barons will be fighting for the last cockboat. It will be devil's holiday at Seaford and Bulverhythe. Even Pevensey and Hastings will be crowded with escaping lords. Winchelsea is a nest of revolted traitors. Remains only Rye."

"Rye! Boy, art mad? It is ten wild leagues, and the horses utterly spent!"

"No more spent than our enemies, sir. And at Rye——" He hesitated.

The old Earl took him up bluntly. "At Rye, forsooth, you hope to find this soft bedfellow who gave you the slip at the Priory. Is this the time for fooling, man?"

For a moment the young knight stiffened haughtily, then his teeth gleamed whitely in the moonlight. "Sir, you touch only half the truth. The girl may not be at Rye, though I confess to hope it, for I have sworn to have her. But my father's son is not a fool. In saying Rye, I have a better reason."

"Then let us have it, in God's name!"

"When I fought my way to you in the castle, sir, from Prince Edward, I brought out with me from my apartment a writing which I think will procure from the Ryers a ship to carry what are left of us across the water. It is the letter sent by the barons of the Port to Leicester, signed by their crafty old Bailiff, pledging the traitor Portsmen to refuse their ships to the King."

"But the King is a broken man. That blunts your dagger."

"One may mend a broken king, and sharpen a blunted dagger, my lord. Leicester stands high to-night, but will he dare the crown? And if he dares, can he keep it? Believe me, this Bailiff may favour Simon, but he favours far more his money-bags. The Queen is in France, and with her many good swords. Let the King be restored, and there is that in this letter from Rye would hang Master Farr and all his Portsmen with him. As I read the old fox, he would gladly buy it back at the price of a ship to France."

The Earl sat awhile silent. Then, "We'll gamble on it," he muttered. "Let the dog land us safe in France, and he shall have his letter. But we run a heavy risk. What if he set his Portsmen on us, and hand us over to Leicester? De Montfort would pay him richly."

"Sir, we are thirty good blades. Shall we fear a rabble of thieving pirates?"

"As for that," grimly answered the Earl, "with enough dogs you can pull down a wild boar. If the old fox is still without his whelp he is like to show us his teeth. Yet we must chance it. At the worst, he shall find us perilous quarry to hunt. Ride!" He turned his horse, and with his son rejoined the waiting knights. The whole band moved off, stubbornly compact as before, but no longer stemming the fugitive crowd, with whom they passed on into the turmoil of the town on their way to the river.

Captain Aylwin struggled on as best he might in their wake. To Rye! They were going in defeat and weariness, but they were thirty swords, thirty of the best knights under de Warenne's banners, and on the way they might gather many as desperate as themselves. And they were mounted, while he was alone and on foot.

It was not difficult in the bloody confusion of the town to secure one of the many abandoned horses which wandered in the darkness that their panic made more perilous. But by the time Garth had succeeded in catching a mount the phalanx of the Earl's knights had left him far in their rear. Past the blazing timbers of houses, through the crowds of

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fugitives and pillagers, over the strewn bodies of dead and stricken, he rode recklessly for the bridge, where the mixed throng of fugitives and pursuers was still so great that many were leaping in their terror into the river and others running wildly into the adjoining marshes, over which the cries of the disturbed sea-fowl made the mournful dirge of many drowning men, many knights sinking miserably with their heavily armed horses in the pits of mud.

Garth himself, despairing of forcing a way through the struggling crowd at the bridge-head, had at first thought to attempt the passage by swimming, and only the terrified trembling of his horse as its hoofs began to sink in the swampy ground warned him in time of his danger and sent him back to the bridge. He was still fighting for a way through the press when a band of white-crossed riders emerged from the town behind, bearing word of the acceptance by the beleaguered Royalists of a truce. With the spread of that news came a gradual lessening of the tide of fleeing men, a thinning of the crowd at the bridge, and at last he found himself on the farther side, a weary horse under him, his strength at its last ebb, and ten long leagues to go to Rosamund and Rye.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOVERNESS OF RYE

THE morning of that bloody day which christened the turf hill over Lewes as Mount Harry for all the future found Rosamund Farr riding with Diccon Lightfoot up the slope to the Landgate of Rye.

The gate was closed, but the guards opened eagerly enough at sight of the Bailiff's daughter. The captain of the gate, one Boniface, a grey sea-dog, ran up and took her hand. "I thank God for the sight of you, mistress; but where are the others they took, and why are you come alone?"

The old man's anxious, questioning glance—his son had been among the hostages carried away by the young Warrene—gave Rosamund a sudden stab of pity.

"I come alone, Captain Boniface," she answered gently, "because I was rescued alone. Captain Aylwin took me from the King's own banquet table in the Priory at Lewes. As for my companions who went hence with me, I can tell you nothing, for since we were made prisoners I have not seen them."

The jurat bowed his head. "It is as God wills," said he. "Mistress Rosamund, is there no news of the good Earl?"

"There is. Yesterday we passed through his camp at Fletching, Diccon here and I. Master Boniface, to-day is the day of England's fate. Even while we stand here the armies of the King and the Earl are at grips."

"God save Lord Simon!" said the jurat gravely, "and make him king over this distracted realm!"

"A score of amens to that, Captain!" cried Lightfoot. "And when the noble Earl is King of England, may he

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make my master lord of Lewes Castle, and Dick Lightfoot chief steward of the same!"

"Is Captain Aylwin with the Earl?" exclaimed Boniface in surprise. "We heard that he was killed. How could he bring you from Lewes, and yet be with de Montfort, mistress?"

"It is a long story," answered Rosamund. "Diccon here will tell you, but I must seek my father. Tell me how he is."

"In evil case, lady, but the sight of you may restore him. Since they took you away the Bailiff has been a broken man. Until a week ago he kept his hold of affairs, growing daily feebler. Yet the town looked to him for guidance, for in experience and wit he is head and shoulders above us all. But now he has taken to his bed, and God knows if he will rise from it. Please God, with your coming he may take hold of life again, for we need him sore. Wanting that wise head of his in the council, we are all at sixes and sevens. If this battle should go against Earl Simon where shall we Portsmen stand?"

Rosamund's grey eyes flashed upon the jurat. "Where else, Master Boniface, but behind the strong walls of Rye, with your bows in your hands?"

"And our sons in Lewes Castle!" he muttered.

Pity touched the girl again at his sombre look, but she held herself proudly and answered firmly.

"Captain, I am a woman, yet some knowledge of men I have learned from my father. I have heard him say that the merchant who succeeds where others fail wins because he gets behind the minds of those he deals with. To do business with princes one must get behind their minds also, and the minds of princes, for all their pride, are not so different from the minds of common men. Consider, are not our Ports the keys of England?"

"Why, certainly, Mistress Rosamund."

"And whoso holds the Ports can open the gates or shut them?"

"Assuredly."

"And of what use is a port without its ships, Master Boniface?"

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The old sailor looked up with a new expression into the proudly flashing eyes.

"No more than the church without the priests, lady."

"Then look where we stand," said Rosamund. "If the Earl goes down—which God forbid!—and the King calls for his ships of Rye——"

"Having our sons already in his hands!" put in the jurat bitterly.

"Very true. But we answer: 'Give us back our Ryers, lord King, who have done no wrong, and our ships are yours, and our seamen shall serve you as heretofore. But let ill befall our sons and brothers, and, by Our Lady who watches over Rye, the ships which lie in our river shall burn at their moorings, and our barons shall withstand you on our walls till Rye Town lieth in ruins, an open door for all your enemies. Ah, Master Boniface, our lads of Rye are safe while their fathers keep stout hearts and strong arms. What are a score of poor lads to King Henry when weighed against the keys of England?'"

The grizzled sea dog stared up at the beautiful, confident face of the girl on her horse. The fighting Saxon eyes under his bushy brows kindled in answer, and the tan of his wrinkled cheek flushed deeper.

"Thunder of God!" he muttered admiringly, "you are one to teach swords to dance, mistress!"

Rosamund gave him a curt nod. "Now I go to the Bailiff. If you will be advised by me, Captain, you will see to it that no stranger enters our gates till news comes from Lewes."

"I will answer for it. With the Bailiff laid aside, the jurats have trusted somewhat to my judgment, lady. Nay, stay a moment!" He took a step nearer, and laid a gnarled hand on her bridle rein, lowering his voice at the same time so that none but she should hear. "The Portsmen, since the Bailiff is no longer able to order our doings, are full of divided counsels. There is courage and to spare, but we are a body without a head. Lady, you are returned in a good hour. Hear me now; let orders go out as from the Bailiff, by the mouth of the Bailiff's daughter, and we Ryers

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will do them to the death! To that I pledge myself and all. You should have been a man to lead us, but, by the Mass, I think it is you who can steer our ship of Rye through these stormy days as can no other. Say you will take the helm, mistress!"

Rosamund flushed at his eager words, and sat thoughtful. "It is not woman's work, Captain," said she then. "Consider: they would trust you and obey you, for your courage and skill are proved."

The old man shook his head. "So is that of many another, my dear. But there is none of us with the strength to trust his judgment and commend it to the rest. For example: a moment since I would have been for opening the gates to the King if the King should come in triumph, for the sake of my boy, whom he holds. But you, a girl, have proved me fool and coward. You have your father's cool brain, and your lover's daring spirit. Lady, you must guide us!"

Very still in her saddle sat Rosamund Farr, her grey eyes gazing straight before her. Ahead, the steep, narrow street of heavily timbered houses wound away westward toward her father's dwelling; behind her, the great stone walls on which the watchmen paced looking out over the flats, and the massive towers of the gate. Was it for this high trust her lover had snatched her from the hands of dishonour? To be the saviour of Rye? The keeper of the keys of England? Her thoughts flew to that lover, perhaps fighting at this very moment under Leicester's banners for the hopes of Englishmen. Her lover, who, if he lived through that fight, had yet to win freedom for himself and her from the ungodly snare in which he had been entrapped. She thought of Garth's pride in his town, his fame among his fellow-barons of the Port. How proper a man he was, her lover! Ah, if Garth could have been now in Rye! There would be no hesitation, no divided counsels then! But now it lay with her. She knew herself strong and courageous, and her townsmen's trust kindled a glowing pride in her heart. Her father would have faced the storm, and her lover would have faced it. Dare she face it in their stead? At last she

turned and looked down with shining eyes on the old jurat-skipper.

"How if I steer you to shipwreck, Master Boniface?"

His slow Saxon smile answered her. "Shipwreck or safety lies with God, girl. The pilot governs, and the crew obeys. Will you be our pilot, Mistress Rosamund?"

"Call the jurats together," she ordered. "If it is their pleasure that I should counsel in my father's stead, I will. But you must be of one mind in the matter."

"Doubt not we shall, and that you shall very soon hear. God keep you, mistress, and restore the Bailiff quickly!" He took his hand from her horse's rein, and Rosamund rode on to the Bailiff's house.

She received the jurats' pledge within the hour, and that day saw her virtually a queen in her father's town. It was in that age of the rule of the strong arm, and in that seagirt town of daring captains, a strange enough position for a girl, however courageous, but Rosamund had little time to consider the strangeness of it.

The aspect of the old Bailiff, her father, struck her to the heart. Roger Farr, keen merchant, shrewd governor, lay seemingly at death's door, and though the sight of her and the assurance of her safety brought a light to his dulled eyes, Rosamund was shocked to perceive the havoc wrought in him by the weeks of anxious agony endured on her account. For the first time she fully understood how his existence had centred on his daughter. His large frame was reduced to the merest shadow of itself; his balanced mind seemed to have lost all grip of affairs; and as he lay on his bed, in his room that looked out over the river toward Winchelsea, he had the air of a man already detached from life, waiting only for the final snapping of the cords binding body and soul. His hair had whitened, and his bearded face had fallen in till his skin was like parchment covering a skull. Rosamund stroked his gaunt cheeks with her strong young hands, smiling on him tenderly.

"Father, you must make haste to be well, or they will make a woman Bailiff of Rye. The jurats have made me promise to act for you, for it seems they cannot do without a Farr."

"My child—my dearest child!" The old man lay clutching her hands with skeleton fingers, tears of weakness running on his hollow cheeks. But Rosamund, seeing the glad light in his eyes, was content.

Her new duties left her little time for private griefs. Woman though she was, she quickly strengthened her position in the confidence of the Portsmen. The day of her installation as Governess of Rye marked a stringent tightening of all the town's defences, a massing of provisions from the countryside, the methodical levying of the Portsmen into watches with fixed hours of duty. Every ship in the port was moored near the walls, with enough fire-feeding stuff in her hold to secure that she would blaze at a moment's notice. Messengers were sent to Winchelsea to exhort a like desperate preparation there. Men came and went all day to and from the Bailiff's house, and each man who spoke with her swelled the tide of courage and confidence which ran through the town.

At nightfall Rosamund had a bed prepared for herself in the Bailiff's sick room, so that through the dark hours the old man should not lose conviction of her return. Her day of homecoming, divided as it had been between the cares of a ruler for the common weal and the care of a daughter for her father, had left her very weary, and there was unwonted pallor in her fair face when she kneeled at last to make her prayers. The high pride which had sustained her through the long day as her father's chosen deputy left her now. Kneeling with tear-dimmed eyes and anxious heart, she felt her woman's weakness in the grip of circumstance. Visions assailed her of her lover lying dead or sore wounded on the stricken field. Strive as she might, she could not put the visions from her. How many men, for whom their women had with anguish besought the protection of high heaven, had perished miserably in this struggle against a king's injustice? Lingeringly her memory dwelt upon that day of Garth's return to Rye, when he had shown her the hard-won spoils of his voyaging, and pledged her his love and loyalty. How long ago it seemed! She lived again the dreadful days of her captivity, and the miracle of

her lover's single-handed rescue, and the thrill of that breathless escape, followed by the stunning revelation made in the dawn, that another woman had stolen her man by guile and held him fast in the bonds of the Church. She could not doubt his loyalty, but that bond of the Church, which with his arm about her and the need pressing for strenuous action had seemed a bar that might break before courage and perseverance, loomed now in the quiet of her chamber grim and high and unscalable as castle-walls. She called up a picture of Adela of Udimore, fair, seductive, a known enchantress of men, and she trembled with a passion of bitter jealousy. Long she fought the tempest in her soul, as she kneeled, bending her hot brow at the foot of the shrine. "Mary, Mother, have pity!" she prayed. "Save him and bring him back to me!"

At last, with a quieter heart, she sought the rest she needed so sorely. But before she lay down, with woman's forethought, she placed ready a brodered mantle and hood of dark blue velvet, one of the choicest pieces of her wardrobe, for she knew the night was big with possibilities, and that at any hour the watch might summon her to instant action. The Governess of Rye must not appear dishevelled before her barons and Portsmen!

Her preparations made, she kissed her father, whose eyes followed her in the dimness of the chamber as though he feared to lose her again; then, setting her couch at his bedside, she composed herself to sleep with the old man's fingers clasping hers.

"Rose!"

Rosamund started awake. It seemed to her she had scarcely laid herself down. Yet the room was in full daylight, though it was still early. Roger Farr was sitting up in his bed. There came a knocking at the chamber door.

Putting on her mantle, Rosamund opened. An old serving-woman, drowsy-eyed from her own interrupted slumbers, entered with a reverence. "Please you, mistress, Master Boniface waits in the hall, and would see you immediately."

"Has he news, Martha?"

"None for old Martha. 'Rouse your mistress, woman, and make haste,' says he."

"Give him a cup of wine, and say I come at once."

Staying only to fasten up the dark cascade of her hair beneath her hood, Rosamund followed the servant into the hall. Boniface the jurat rose with a look of concern.

"Mistress Farr, we have to make decision." He glanced round to see that no other remained in hearing. "The Earl Warenne with some thirty riders is at the gate, demanding instant admission."

"The Earl Warenne? Captain, are you very sure?"

"It is most certain. The old wolf and his son Lord William, and thirty riders with them."

"What news of the battle?"

"Rosamund, I asked. 'Open the gate, fellow, in the King's name!' says my lord, as haughty as Lucifer, 'or, by God's blood,' says he, 'your town will fare the worse!'"

"And you replied?"

"I said, 'Lord Earl, I am under orders. I will report to the Bailiff. Be pleased to await my return.'"

"What think you, Master Boniface? Is the King victorious?"

"If so, mistress, victory weareth a tattered robe. The Earl and his knights are bloody with fighting, and muddied with hard riding. Their mail cries for the armourer, and they sit their horses like men ready to drop from the saddle. Shall I admit them?"

Rosamund stood and considered swiftly.

"Either the King is overthrown and these have fled—yet why flee so far?—or else, Captain, Leicester's army is scattered and the Warennes are for securing the Ports against the fugitives. I have heard the house of Lewes is swift and ruthless in war. Will the Portsmen still obey if I command?"

"The jurats will see to it, mistress."

"Then go back. Say to the Earl Warenne that he and his son may enter, each with one knight to attend him. The rest to wait outside the walls till we have spoken with the Earl. And mark well, Captain. The Earl's men are to

leave free the approaches to the gate for any who may come. Failing strict observance of this article, you will sally out in strength to attack them. Is it understood?"

"Spoken like your father's daughter, Rosamund!" The old mariner chuckled as he added, "Victors or beaten, these Lewes knights would make poor show in their present state against our stark Ryers! Will you see the Earl here?"

"The Earl and Lord William. No others. Let the jurats be summoned to council."

Thereon Boniface returned to the Landgate, and Rosamund retired to array herself for the meeting. Her overnight pallor of weariness was gone; the blood flamed in her cheeks, and as she prepared for the ordeal the grey eyes flashed dangerously.

Meanwhile, though the day had scarce begun, and the narrow streets were yet cool with early shadows, the news of the Earl's summons spread like wildfire as the call went to each jurat's dwelling, and one after another the leaders of the Portsmen, in scarlet robes hastily donned, strode over the cobbled ways to the Bailiff's. Not till all were seated round the great table in the hall, with Rosamund queening it in the Bailiff's chair, were the Earl Warenne and his son escorted ceremoniously into the hall by a double line of armed Portsmen, and conducted to two seats placed for them fronting the table. At the Earl's entry the jurats rose in a body to give due honour to so high a noble, and not till he and his son were seated did they silently resume their places.

Still in their battered war-harness, and with stains of blood and travel, their faces grim and haggard with endurance, father and son made sorry contrast with the rich robes of the Portsmen's council. Nevertheless, the grey-haired noble surveyed the assembly with glances of fierce contempt, and presently broke the silence with a scornful laugh.

"What means this mummary, my masters?" he demanded. "Which of you is Bailiff of Rye?"

Rosamund, averting her gaze from the blood-streaked, staring face of the younger knight, and steadily meeting the elder's haughty front, made answer:

The Governess of Rye

"I am the daughter of Roger Farr, the Bailiff, and till he recovers of his sickness am set in his place by the will of the jurats. My lord Earl, what is your pleasure with us?"

De Warenne's short, scornful laugh returned. "Not my pleasure, pretty one, whom I seem to have seen before in happier circumstances, but my necessity. A good ship, and quickly, to convey myself and these with me to France."

"My lord, our ships of Rye are the King's ships, and for no other business."

"By God's blood!" swore the Earl angrily. "Is not the necessity of the King's friends the King's business? Girl, do not bandy words with me. Time presses. I say, find me a ship."

"Lord Earl, with submission I ask you: how are we poor folk of Rye to judge of this necessity?"

"By the word of a Norman knight, wench!" cried de Warenne, angered still more by her use of the Saxon tongue for the benefit of her jurats, though he understood it well enough. "The King's army is overthrown by traitors, the King's person is besieged in Lewes Priory, and God knows if the villains will leave him with either crown or life. Therefore, I say, a ship, and quickly."

At that bald news of the royal defeat the jurats rose instinctively. Excitement and amazement showed in every face, and frank triumph in some. Only Rosamund and the two nobles kept their places. The Governess of Rye had paled. Leaning forward, round chin cupped in firm white hand, she met the imperious eye of the Baron with grave calm.

"If it be as you say, lord Earl, doubtless you bring written authority from his Majesty to use our ships in this emergency. The ships of Rye move only on two kinds of errands: those of the King and those of the Ryers who command them. Show me, therefore, your authority and you shall have the best ship of our fleet."

Like an old wolf at bay, stung suddenly by a spear-prick, the Earl sprang fiercely to his feet, and the jurats wilted before the glare of his wrath.

"Is there no man here with wit to answer me, that I must

chaffer with a girl?" he cried. "Hark to me, ye voiceless dogs! I, John of Warenne, Earl of Lewes, command you to provide me with a ship within the hour. And woe to you if ye exceed the time!"

"And I," said Rosamund, rising swiftly and proudly, "who act as Bailiff here for Roger Farr my father, tell the Earl Warenne that we of Rye convey merchandise and men at our own price, and not for threats of any."

At this point Sir William looked up with a twisted smile on his scarred, handsome face, and spoke for the first time.

"Beauteous Bailiff, it may be we can offer a price to tempt you. I have here a certain letter——"

A great noise of acclamation from the street without and a sudden commotion about the door of the hall interrupted him. For a moment all eyes turned to see the cause, as the door flung open and a man staggered in—a tall, gaunt, wild-eyed man in forester dress, who made straight across the hall toward the nobles. The young de Warenne drew his sword from its scabbard, and stood like a cornered fox awaiting the attack of his enemy. But Rosamund cried out:

"Garth, stop!"

Captain Aylwin stood as if turned to stone, and stared at the table with its ring of jurats and at the girl who gazed at him with her soul in her eyes.

There was a stillness in the hall till Garth found his voice.

"Barons of Rye," said he, "have a care what ye do! The King is prisoner to Earl Simon, his army is broken, and these"—he pointed to the Warenes—"should be caged till Leicester deal with them."

Rosamund, one hand to her breast, the other leaning for support on the table before her, fought with the joy and pride that filled her at sight of her lover. The blood came and went in her face. A smile moved her lips and lit her eyes, but she stayed mistress of herself.

"Captain Aylwin, your news is known; but the noble Earl Warenne and his son have opened to the jurats a matter for careful consideration. It may be that yourself can serve in this better than another." Smiling still, she turned to Lord William. "You spoke of a letter, my lord?"

The Governess of Rye

“Ha, yes, the letter!” It was the Earl himself who took up the challenge. “I had forgot the letter. Girl, and you Portsmen, have a care! Our lord the King hath lost a battle, and for the moment the King’s friends go in peril. For the moment traitors flourish, but, bethink you, it will not always be so! King Henry will yet set the head of Leicester on London Bridge—or, if not the King, then the Prince his son. Your Earl makes too many foes to establish himself on a throne. And when the day comes, and the axe bites through his traitor’s neck, how, think you, shall they stand who set themselves to work treason with him? Come, now, you are merchants here in Rye. Here is a letter”—he took the scroll from his son—“that shall one day hang every man of you if you redeem it not in good time. And that time is now.” He held up before the jurats the letter with the seal of the Port.

The robed councillors glanced at each other, at Aylwin, and then at Rosamund, who stood facing the sneering noble with a pride that equalled his own.

“Lord Earl,” said she, in tones of ice, “it is said you are a notable fighter, and though meseems you and yours have run fast and far, I will not decry your courage. Yet I think you have little knowledge of commerce and barter. We, who are merchants, as you have said, understand such business better. When we send our trade across the seas, it is because we have need of that which we do not possess. Why offer us what we have already? We have but to seize upon your persons, and hand you over to Earl Simon, and that letter is already ours. No, no, my lord. Think us not so simple. Nevertheless, there is perhaps a price for which we may send you safe to France.”

The Earl, meeting the steady grey eyes of the girl, read there a determination that outfaced him. “State it, woman, in the fiend’s name!” he muttered sullenly.

The Governess of Rye turned to the jurats. “Portsmen, hear me. This lord, in his castle at Lewes, holds prisoner many young men of our town, whom his son here carried away for hostages when he took me also. By the goodness of God and the valour of Captain Aylwin I was delivered

from that captivity. With your favour I will tell the Earl Warenne the price we Ryers will take for the lives of himself and his men. They shall pay us three things. The first is the liberty of your sons and daughters whom they have seized. Those who agree hold up their hands."

Every hand was raised.

"The second is that the letter which Sir William of Warenne stole forcibly from our messenger, Captain Aylwin, shall this moment be restored to our keeping. Do you agree?"

Again the hands went up.

"Those two are payments for the common weal," said Rosamund. "The third is different. It is the fee for the navigator who takes them to safety. Captain Aylwin, stand forward."

Under the shining compulsion of her eyes Garth advanced to the council table.

"Jurats," said Rosamund—and now the rich colour flooded her face—"here is one who has done our port great service, as you all do know. My father, Roger Farr, when he sent Captain Aylwin with our letter to the Earl of Leicester, promised him myself in marriage. This Sir William laid wait for him, stripped him of the letter, and left him at death's door from his wounds. Jurats, he was found thus by the Lady Adela of Udimore. All men know of her, and how she could not inherit her father's lands till she should be wed. While Captain Aylwin lay delirious and, as was thought, dying from his wounds this Adela heard him say my name. Then—it is a thing nigh unbelievable, yet it befell as I say—this Adela feigned herself to be me, and by that foul fraud brought him, in his fever, to wed her. She thought him dying, but he did not die. Jurats, there is one way and one only for Captain Aylwin to be freed from the shackles the Church has laid on him, and that is by the grace of our father the Pope. Therefore the third term of the price which I demand from the Earl Warenne is a letter written here and now in his own hand praying our most Holy Father, who knoweth well his zeal for the Church, to do this justice and annul such shameful bonds. Jurats, do you agree?"

The Governess of Rye

This time there seemed less unanimity. The red robes rustled, and whispers went round.

"Mistress Rosamund," said old Boniface gently, "this matter, it seemeth, is one of private wrong rather than public policy. It is a grievous wrong to you and to our brave brother Aylwin. But it doth not touch, methinks, the welfare of Rye."

At that the Earl smiled dourly. "It seems your price is too high, pretty one. Your worthy councillor speaks wisdom. The love affairs of your Rye sea-captains, and even of Bailiffs' daughters, are not matters of State."

"Say you so, Earl Warenne?" Fiercely Garth Aylwin turned his back to Rosamund and the jurats, and with naked sword in hand glowered upon the proud old noble. "By God and God's Mother, I will teach you differently!" Round he swung again to his fellow-townsmen. "Jurats and brother-Portsmen, the Earl of Leicester is master of England. Many a lord as high as these lieth dead and broken on Lewes Downs, where I and better men fought for Earl Simon and the liberties of this land. This William of Warenne took your Bailiff's daughter, and would have debauched her in his father's castle, and his life is forfeit to me. For the sake of one who twice saved mine I would have foregone my vengeance, but this I swear: if Earl John write not forthwith as Mistress Farr hath said I will kill Sir William before you all. And whoso will gainsay me vows himself with the same breath enemy to Earl Simon and to me!" He flashed a defiant glance round the startled circle of the jurats, and along the line of the guards, and in the eyes of the armed men he read a silent approval.

The Warennnes faced him, and three stained, naked swords shone dully before the council table. The guards watched expectantly.

"Jurat dogs," said the Earl bitterly, "if you will butcher us under your safe-conduct, set about it, yet remember we are not the last of the Warennnes!"

"Put up your swords!" Pale to the lips but steadfastly unyielding, Rosamund made her voice ring through the hall. "Jurats, by your own ordaining, it is I who command

in Rye. Take back your commission, or trust me. I say that public weal thrives not on private wrong. And I say, my lords of Warenne, I have told you the price of your lives. Pay it, and live. Refuse it, and we hand you to Earl Simon."

The jurats might look blank, but the eyes of the guard gleamed sympathy, and the two nobles stood hesitating.

"Lord Earl, we await your answer, but the sea-tides will not wait."

"If I pay," persisted de Warenne, "how will the Bailiff of Rye control this madman?"

Rosamund glanced at the haggard figure of her lover, and her pale face suddenly smiled.

"When the letter is written and signed, lord Earl, the Bailiff of Rye will give order that Captain Garth Aylwin shall forthwith conduct you and your son to France in his ship the *Royal Richard*, and land you there in freedom and safety, and thence continue his journey to Rome. Furthermore, you and Sir William on your side, and Captain Aylwin on his side, shall make solemn oath to bury the past and its wrongs, both as regards yourselves and this town."

"Fair lady," said the younger noble, "can an oath bind when extorted under a threat of death?"

Rosamund faced him, and the hot blood dyed her cheek. "Do you Warenes so fear death, Sir William?"

The Earl answered. "None have ever accused us of it, madame." His voice held a greater respect than heretofore.

"Then where is the extortion, my lord? We are sellers, you buyers. You pay our price or refuse it as you esteem your worth to the King."

"By God, madame," answered Warenne, "you bargain shrewdly. And since his Majesty, through the loss of many loyal friends, must needs lean the more upon those that remain, it behoves us pay your price. Here is the letter from your council which miscarried."

He laid the parchment on the table. "As for your hostages from Rye"—he shrugged his weary shoulders—"I will write an order to release them, but, by my faith, I

think it needless, since Leicester's rebels will ere now be master of my poor castle. As for the letter to our Holy Father, it is less simple. We poor knights have no skill in Latin. You must find us a clerk."

"Have no fear, my lord. The letter shall be fairly done into Latin by a good Churchman, and attested properly." She turned to the guards near the door. "Let the Prior be brought. In the meantime, lords, I will set down the main matter. The clerk shall insert the framework as beseems. Will it please you be seated while I draft the substance."

Pen, ink, and parchment were brought, and the Governess of Rye sat and for some minutes wrote thoughtfully, her fair forehead supported on her left hand, her grey eyes never raised under their dark lashes till her task was done. Around her the jurats sat wondering. Only an occasional jingle of mail from the line of guards broke the silence. The beaten nobles sullenly watched the moving pen, and Captain Aylwin, his sword sheathed, his arms folded across his slowly heaving chest, stood frowning and thoughtful. At last Rosamund laid down her pen.

"My lords and jurats, these are the terms of the letter which Captain Aylwin will take to Rome:

"We, John, Earl of Warenne, and William his son, do earnestly beseech your Grace, by the love and loyalty which our house hath ever displayed toward Holy Church, as witnessed by the foundation and maintenance at our own proper costs of the Priory of the holy St Pancras at our town of Lewes, to receive into your fatherly consideration the bearer of these presents, our well-beloved friend and countryman, Captain Garth Aylwin, a baron and freeman of Rye. We beseech you graciously to give ear to the humble plaint and petition of the said Garth Aylwin, which we do hereby most solemnly declare of our own proper knowledge to be true in all respects. And furthermore, to commend our said well-beloved Garth Aylwin to your fatherly goodness, we do hereby humbly make known to your Grace that, following upon the late unhappy warfare in England, and the overthrow of our lord King Henry, whom may God preserve and comfort, the said Garth Aylwin hath

at his own risk and peril delivered both ourselves and many other the King's faithful friends from the hands of our enemies, setting us safely in the land of France, whereby haply we may live to serve our lord the King, restoring him if God will to his crown and dignity, and releasing him from the hands of his enemies. Now the petition of our well-beloved Garth Aylwin showeth that whereas he was promised in marriage to a certain honourable damsel, daughter of one Roger Farr, Bailiff of the King's Port of Rye in Sussex, and a very worthy son and frequent benefactor of Holy Church in the said town, yet the same Aylwin, being upon a journey, and being attacked and wounded by the way, and being grievously sick and beside himself with the delirium of fever, was so found by the wayside by a certain Adela of Udimore. Which said Adela by her father's prudence was debarred from inheritance of his lands and goods till she should come of age and be wedded to one of noble rank, and the inheritance thus be made secure in a strong hand. The said Adela therefore, coming upon Master Aylwin as aforesaid, and believing him at the point of death, did cunningly seduce and deceive him to believe her his betrothed, that is to say, Rosamund, daughter of Roger Farr as aforesaid. And with that wicked pretence, and in the dire confusion of his mind, the said Adela did there and then cozen the said Garth Aylwin and induce him to wed her. Whereby not only hath grievous injustice been wrought to our well-beloved Garth Aylwin and the said Roger Farr and his daughter, but great scandal and affront hath been offered to Holy Church and her sacraments. Wherefore the said Garth Aylwin doth make humble petition to your Grace, and we with him, that it may please your Grace to order that the said marriage shall be null and void. For the necessary expenses of which cause our well-beloved Garth Aylwin cometh properly prepared, and will at his own proper charges defray the same, making also of his love and loyalty to Holy Church such thank-offering as it may please your Grace to direct, for his deliverance and the welfare of Christian souls."

A wry smile twisted the Earl's harsh features as Rosamund finished the reading of this petition.

"Madame, if our well-beloved Garth Aylwin hath a wit to match yours—which I much doubt—then, by my faith, I had rather know the twain of you my friends than my enemies. They say our Holy Father loves a fat

thank-offering. Son William, you are no match for this lady's wits."

"Will you sign, my lord?" asked Rosamund quietly.

"By the bones of holy Pancras, I will sign with a good heart. Fair mistress, you were born for better things than to govern Rye. Pray you, when does our ship sail?"

"The tide is rising," Rosamund answered. "You cannot sail before the ebb. At noon it will be high water. By then the *Royal Richard* shall be stocked and ready to convey you, and our Prior shall have made a fair Latin letter for your signing. Meanwhile, will it please you refresh yourselves, my lords? Your companions shall be admitted and suitably entertained."

As she ordered, so it was done. The *Royal Richard*, thanks to the careful stewardship of Master Farr, had long since been overhauled and refitted after her last voyage, and only awaited a cargo and a crew. Diccon Lightfoot, hastily scouring the Port, had no difficulty even at such short notice in finding most of Garth's rovers ready to take the sea again, and for the few vacant places there was no lack of mariners to volunteer for service under a captain so renowned for daring and success. The ship was brought to the quayside, and all through the morning hours her lading with arms and provender went forward with a will. Garth himself, for all his weariness of battle and journeying, personally inspected the work lest anything be omitted. Of the store of treasure his vessel had so lately brought home a goodly portion was again placed in her for the necessities of his present venture. Popes and cardinals, he supposed, opened their mouths wide to such an opportunity. Well, he would fill them to the teeth, impoverishing himself now for Rosamund if need be with the same lavishness with which he had won the Bailiff's favour.

By an hour after noon all was ready for the departure. The Earl's letter, duly translated, signed by the two Warennas, and properly attested, lay securely wrapped in a small leathern case and fastened about Garth's neck by a strong silken cord; the fugitives were aboard, their arms—save only for the swords of the Earl and his son—taken from them till France

should be reached; and Garth stood beside Rosamund on the quay for a last farewell.

She, who had played the Governess of Rye a few hours before so proudly, was now distressed and pale. "Oh, my lover, I am afraid!" she whispered. "This is a dizzy path we tread among the great ones. When, for humble folk, were such things done as we seek?"

"Why, what's this, sweetheart?" he rallied her. "Great ones, do you say? Are they not made like us all? Have you not tamed this swaggering earl with a touch of whole some fear, and made him eat out of your hand? If fear will tame an earl, will not avarice tame a pope? Show a priest gold enough, and he will dance to any tune you play. We shall be each other's, never fear, and Holy Church bestow her benediction from Rome itself. Look on my sweet ship!" With a sailor's pride he turned towards his waiting vessel, her deck filled with seamen making ready. "Never yet hath she failed me, neither ship nor crew. Pray for a prosperous voyage, my Rose, and watch for our return. We will have such a wedding as Rye has never known!"

"Oh, my dear, if it could be so! But my heart quakes, Garth! The Prior, when he read the letter, looked strangely. I asked him, did he not think the Pope would annul your marriage. He answered, 'Daughter, how can I say!' 'What would you do, Prior?' said I. 'Daughter,' said he, 'the Holy Father is wiser than I, but to such request I should answer that the ways of God are not the ways of men, and that what God hath joined let not man put asunder.'"

"The Prior is a reverend fool!" cried Garth roughly. "Not God, but the devil in His name, joined me to Adela of Udimore. And though I think not so hardly of her as this letter saith, yet hers I never was nor will be, for all the popes and cardinals that ever preached in Rome. So kiss me, sweetheart, and pray for my ship and me!"

Then Rosamund, her pride all gone, flung her arms about her lover's neck, and in fierce defiance of all who saw them clung to him, lips to lips. At last they drew apart, and with smarting eyes and heaving breast, but with mouth firm set

The Governess of Rye

and head held high, she stood by herself on the timbered quay, and saw the mooring ropes splash to the ebbing tide, and the great square sail clamber up the mast, while the banner of Rye fluttered from the yard, and the *Royal Richard*, her captain aloft on the high castellated stern, went sweeping in the May sunshine out to the river mouth and the sparkling sea.

CHAPTER XVII

PASSENGERS FROM FRANCE

THE year had swung full circle since the *Royal Richard* sailed from the Rother. Summer was come again, the southward flying birds had returned to the marshes and the woodlands, but of the ship's company of Rye men who had sailed for Rome with Captain Aylwin no word had come back. Shipmen came and went at the quays of Rye, but no captain had news of the *Royal Richard* and her crew. Since the day her captain had landed the Earl Warenne and his companions on the Brittany coast Aylwin and his Ryers had vanished from the knowledge of the Ports.

There was, indeed, little enough matter for wonder in that. In an age when ships voyaged by guess-work and the grace of God, when to the perils of storms and uncharted coasts were added the greater perils of death or capture at the hands of Christian or Moor, the marvel rather was that so many ships nevertheless came safe to haven. Many there were, friends of the *Royal Richard's* crew, who had long abandoned hope, and in the few with whom hope still stayed it clung precariously to its hold by nothing more substantial than the fighting record of Captain Aylwin and his high repute as a navigator.

Chief among those who refused to despair was the Bailiff's daughter. No longer Governess of Rye now that old Roger had renewed his strength and resumed the guidance of the Port, Rosamund kept her head high and her heart steeled against despondency. Through the short days and the long she watched the tides flood into Rother; never a ship from over-seas furlled her sails in the river but Rosamund must hear her captain's record of his voyage. Quietly she listened

Passengers from France

to many a tale of adventure, and quietly in return imparted the news of the Ports and of the realm of England. Captain after captain told of strange meetings, but never the meeting she longed to hear of. Captain after captain home from long absence learned the course of history since he had sailed. At first the news was of how, after the great victory, England rested from domestic treason and foreign levy; how King Henry, leaving his royal son as hostage for his good behaviour, had made a peace with his barons, and everywhere accompanied his "dear and faithful" Simon de Montfort; how the King's writ ran as before, though the power behind it was the Earl's; how the Pope from Rome had denounced the Barons' party nevertheless, and sent his legate Cardinal Fulcodio to withdraw the clergy from them; how the Barons had refused Fulcodio permission to land at the Ports, and thereupon the Holy Father had solemnly excommunicated Earl Simon and the Barons in general and the Cinque Ports in particular, notwithstanding which fulmination Barons and Portsmen had cheerfully continued their devotions as heretofore, while the Dover men, to whom the Papal messengers brought their interdict, tore the document to pieces, and threw it, as Captain Aylwin had done before under similar circumstances, into the sea.

As the months passed the homecoming skippers learnt other things: that the Barons in the new spirit of nationality had prohibited the export of wool and the import of foreign cloth, and that Englishmen, instead of sending their wool to Flanders to be coloured, were wearing their own produce undyed. Next, that the hostage Prince had been moved from Dover to Wallingford, where, it was said, a desperate rescue had been attempted by Royalist knights, but baulked by the fierce threat of the surprised garrison to hurl the King's son on a sling from the castle-walls. At Christmas there had been a great assembly at Earl Simon's castle of Kenilworth, to which he had caused the royal hostages to be removed. There, it was said, in the midst of a great parade, and having no less than a hundred and fifty knights around him in his pay, the Earl of Leicester had taken measures to call together a great Parliament of the realm. In March

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the Parliament was held, and to the vast confiscations exacted by the victors at Lewes some said that Earl Simon had added for himself the whole of Cheshire, lest the holders of those lands should confederate with Mortimer and the Welsh Marchers; others, on the other hand, declared that the Earl's constant prayer to God was that divine grace would preserve him unstained by the avarice and covetousness of worldly things which had ensnared so many.

As the anniversary of Lewes drew near the complexion of the news which Rosamund and the Ryers had to retail to the returning captains took on a more disturbing aspect. Men whispered that the fiery young de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, whose powerful support had stood the Barons' party in such good stead, had fallen out with his great chief for refusing his claim to the ransom of the King's brother, Richard of Germany, self-styled King of the Romans and "august." This was the "bad miller" whom the populace ridiculed in rhyme, because for all his pride he had fled from Lewes fight, and been taken prisoner in an old mill on the Downs by John Befs, a humble squire.

The King of Alemaine gathered his host,
Made him a castle of a mulne post,
Went with his proud and his muckle boast,
Brought from Alemaine many sorry gost¹
To help Windsor.

So ran the rough, jeering rhyme of the English, coupling Richard with "trichard," or trickster, and vowing that he should trick England nevermore. It was even rumoured that the Earl of Gloucester, with other malcontents, were in treacherous correspondence with Roger Mortimer and the Royalists on the Marches of Wales, and that the Earl Warenne would shortly join them there from his Continental exile. And now in May Peter of Savoy, the Queen's uncle, had defied the Barons in his castle at Pevensey, where he was besieged by Simon de Montfort the younger; Fitzalan had barred himself in his stronghold at Arundel; the North had raised the standard of revolt against the Barons, and every-

¹ Wicked fellows.

Passengers from France

where the King's party was reviving, while the great Earl of Leicester was daily ploughing more troubled waters.

Thus in the early summer of this year of 1265 the thunder-cloud of civil war hung heavy again over England, streaked with perilous lightnings, and muttering angry threats of worse to come.

Along the Channel coast a full week of sultry calms, unusual for the time of the year, had hurried fields and woodlands into a riot of festive green, and streaked the sunny waves with barriers of dense sea-mist.

One day that week, because the fishing inshore was none too good in such calm weather, two venturous men of Winchelsea had pushed their craft farther out to sea than was their habit, and on a certain still afternoon found themselves, with nets down, suddenly enveloped in the clammy opaqueness of a drifting sea-fog. With the fog came a faint breeze, but ere they felt the breeze the distant line of the shore had been obliterated, and the sun quite hidden, so that the two fishermen, adrift with the tide, had no longer any means of telling their direction.

For some time they took no particular note of the fog, being content to await its lifting with reasonable patience. But as the monotonous hours passed, and the greyness did not lighten, the fishermen began to grow uneasy.

"Best have the nets up, and be away, Tom," the elder said, "before the ebb takes we down Channel."

"And how pull home through this murk?" the other demanded. "Up nets, a' God's name, but down anchor, Jack, says I, and lay on the beds till us can see north from south."

They wrangled wordily awhile, then, the younger giving in, they set to work to haul up their nets. The operation was nearly completed, and the pocket of the net, well filled with gleaming, silvery, leaping fish, was coming in over the stern, when the younger fisherman, chancing to glance sideways as he hauled, uttered a sudden hoarse shout, let go his corner of the net without word or warning, and sprang back amidships. The other, grabbing the receding net, turned to curse his comrade, but as suddenly followed his example,

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and the pair of them, shouting like madmen, gazed aloft at the great darkly looming mass that threatened momentarily to overwhelm their frail craft.

From the high bulwarks of the looming ship shadowy figures looked down, and a confusion of voices hailed them.

"A plaguy Frenchman, Tom! Fend off, or he swamps us!" The old man shook a gnarled brown fist, and swore lustily at the shipmen.

The French ship was drifting slowly under bare poles, and the fishermen succeeded in shoving clear with their oars. Then from the foreigner's deck an English voice hailed.

"Boat ahoy! How far are we from Pevensey?"

"Maybe three leagues, master, maybe seven. How the devil can a man tell, wrapped in this accursed fog?"

"Where are you from, lads?"

"Winchelsea."

"Why, that's good tidings! Stand by, countrymen, and catch a hold of this line. Our captain has work for you."

"You can keep your line to hang yourself with, master. As for your Frenchman captain, please God he drift on the beach, and we will pay ourselves for our lost catch."

"Besotted fool!" answered the sailor. "Know there are bowmen here aboard who, if they understood your crazy words, would stick you both as full of arrows as a bass is full of bones. French or English, what matters, so they fill your hands with silver. Catch the line while I speak to the skipper, or God help you!"

Close on the words came a line, flung with true aim at the fishers' feet. The elder caught it and made fast, still grumbling wrathfully. There was a consultation on the deck above them, then the English voice hailed again.

"There is a gentleman here who must be set a-land. Draw in your boat, fellows. On the faith of a free Ryer, you shall not lack payment."

"Faith is a good dog, but sight is a better," growled fisherman Jack, hauling in the line, nevertheless, till the boat

Passengers from France

lay close under the swaying hull. "What colour is your money, Master Ryer?"

A second shadowy figure, leaning overside beside the ship's spokesman, flung out his arm, and half a dozen silver pieces rang on the bottom boards of the boat.

"A bone for you, damned dogs of the beach," came haughtily from the thrower, who spoke the Saxon words carefully, as a man speaks a foreign tongue.

But fishermen Tom and Jack at sight of the silver troubled no more with niceties of nationality. They fell on the money like starving whelps on food—it would buy many nets, and compensate many lost catches—and when they had secured it they looked up greedily.

A rope ladder had been flung over the ship's side, and a man was descending cautiously, a young man in a rich cloak, who clutched the swinging rope like one unused to such rude appliances, and waited carefully for the boat to come beneath him, and, as it came nearer, rising and falling with the swell, seemed to hesitate nervously ere he would trust himself to quit the safety of the ship's side.

"Jump, worshipful sir! Jump, or we are swamped!" cried Tom encouragingly. Above their heads the faces of the French crew lined the bulwarks, grinning at the passenger's hesitation. The captain, a great black-bearded fellow, stood outboard on the bulwark, holding to the shrouds.

"Sautex, monseigneur! Sautex vite! Ah—ventre Dieul!"

The second exclamation, fierce and quick, had nothing to do with the passenger, who had jumped and landed safe in the boat. But among the line of the watching crew there was a sudden scuffle. A man swung over the side like a monkey, and amid a chorus of angry exclamations came slithering down the ladder. As he descended a blow was aimed with an axe at his hand that clutched one side of the ladder. The fugitive dodged the blow by the fraction of a second, and the axe-blade bit through the rope, crashing into the ship's timbers. The half-severed ladder swung to one side, but even so the monkey-like climber kept his grip. The fishermen's stern swung up scarce a yard away, and the

man, doubling swiftly like a cat for a spring, leaped clear across the intervening streak of water, and landed on the osier baskets in her stern as the smack swung down again to the fall of the sea.

"Lay into it for your lives!" he yelled, and as the two fishers stared blankly at him from the thwarts he whipped a knife from his belt and shook it in their faces. "Pull, damn you!" he shouted, and with the knife-blade flashing under their eyes Tom and Jack pulled with a will. Into the clammy curtain of the fog the boat drew off, and already the French ship was a blur on the greyness, when they heard the twang of bowstrings, and as the little boat lifted her stern to a wave a couple of arrows stuck shivering in her quarter.

If the newcomer's voice of roaring command and his naked blade needed reinforcement, the whirring bowstrings supplied it. Fishermen Tom and Jack tugged at the oars like men possessed. Fear and wrath contended in their straining faces as they threw themselves forward and backward, and the sweat came out on their tanned faces as their clumsy craft splashed through the waves.

For a while not a word came from either of the passengers. The young gentleman drew his mantle about him, and sat looking round warily, like one accustoming himself to strange surroundings. The fourth man, a powerful, wiry fellow, sat beside him, swaying easily to the roll of the boat, the thumb of his left hand playfully caressing his knife's keen point, while his quick eyes watched the rowers like a cat.

"Easy now!" he said at last, in a tone of assurance. The fishermen lay on their oars obediently. "Which way, think you, lies Rother mouth, my masters?"

"God help me, I know no more than you," answered the older man.

The sailor laughed. "And you call yourselves fishermen? By St Peter, you deserve to drown. My lord"—he turned to his fellow passenger—"if I set us safe ashore will you bestow me a handful of those pretty coins your Worship wasted on these honest blockheads?"

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"By my knighthood, that will I very willingly, good fellow. Pray, how know you me?"

"I know your Worship well enough. It is not the first time I have had a hand in saving you. But then we were bound the other way. You are Lord William of Warrene."

"And, being so, am worth the saving," said the young man haughtily. He searched the other's leather-brown face with greater attention. "But I cannot call you to mind."

For the moment, however, the sailor vouchsafed no more. "Good Master Lobster-pot, where is your anchor?" he demanded of the old fisher.

"Of what use to anchor, with yonder pirate ship within a mile?" was the surly reply.

"Anchor, thou wooden-headed knave!"

At the harsh authority of the tone old Jack got out his iron hook and dropped it overside. Presently the cable dragged taut, and the new commander glanced down into the water. He nodded, seeming well content, though the opaque fog shut round them like a wall.

"Hearken now, both of you, and I will teach you a little of your trade," said he. "The tide is ebbing, is it not?"

"Aye, the tide be ebbing, master. At the half-ebb, maybe. Maybe more."

"Then it floweth down Channel, and westerly."

"True."

"And there is a breeze, is there not?"

"A little breeze, master."

"And the breeze cometh abeam, from starboard?"

"Why, yes."

"Therefore, O simple ones, the breeze is southerly, and therefore again, if ye up-sail and run before it, it will set us ashore. Heave in your hook and away with you, and whether we hit Winchelsea or Rye, Pevensey, Hastings, or Bulverhythe, I care not, so we hit the strand of England, from which I have been absent overlong." Without further ado he shipped the rude tiller, while the two fishermen sheepishly enough proceeded to carry out his orders.

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Presently the boat was running easily through the fog before the light following wind.

Sir William of Warene turned to the pilot. "How came you, an English seaman, on a ship of Fécamps?"

"That were a long story, my lord of Warene. A weary coil, with a tangled end. I have served worse masters than the French since you and I sailed on the *Royal Richard*."

"Ha!" The young knight started. "You were on the *Royal Richard*? Captain Aylwin's ship?"

"The same, my lord, that set you and the Earl your father and your worshipful company a-land in Brittany. God knoweth how long ago."

"A year ago, man. And where is Captain Aylwin now?"

"As to that, I know not. But where he was when Diccon Lightfoot last beheld him I know too well."

"And where was that, good fellow?" the knight demanded eagerly.

"Sweating under a Southern sun, in the islands east of Spain, in slavery to accursed pirates, renegades, and Moors," Lightfoot answered, with sudden bitterness. "My brave captain, with all his ship's company save some that were slain. And the *Royal Richard* with a heathen standard at her masthead floating to taunt them in the haven."

"Ha!" exclaimed the knight again, a fierce satisfaction in his tones.

Diccon scowled at him. "Hate him hard, my lord. Yet remember my captain kept faith with you all, risking his ship and crew to land you safely among your friends, when by the letter of his bond he might have landed you in danger among your enemies. Oh, I was present in the Bailiff's hall at Rye! 'France' was where he was to set you. And the Earl of Leicester hath wide lands in France."

"He will have need of them ere long!" said de Warene. "De Montfort and all his rebel lords are riding for a fall. Oh, Leicester's pride shall be humbled soon enough!"

"It may be so, Lord William; I know not, having been so long away. But this I know, that when I come to Rye, and tell my tale to the Ports-men, there are stout ships that will stay neither for the King on his throne nor Earl Simon in his

castle, but will put to sea with men and treasure for the love of the bravest captain of them all."

Sir William smiled a little contemptuously. "It is a far voyage to Spain, and they say the Saracens do not keep their prisoners long."

"A prisoner will live while he keeps heart of hope. God, do I not know!" Diccon bared a muscular arm, and showed old scars of fetters. Scars of wounds also.

The knight was interested. "Tell me how you escaped."

"After the fight when we were taken—there were four galleys that swooped on the *Royal Richard* as we lay becalmed at night—they made her a decoy, fitting her for rowers, and chaining us that were left to the oars. Then, with a mongrel crew of drivers, Moors and Christians and renegades, they sent us out to deceive Christian shipping, while they hid swift galleys in some near-by shore. Captain Aylwin and me they chained to the same oar. There came a day when my leg-chain, worn thin near the ankle, snapped as I pulled at the oar in the midst of a battle with a Venetian vessel. 'Captain,' says I, 'I am for over the side. If I die, my time in Purgatory will be shortened, I hope, by the time I have spent here. If I live, I will bring help from Rye.' By God's blessing I won to the Venetian's rudder-chains, all shackled as I was, and, the fight going hard against the heathen dogs, they were beaten off, and I was dragged half dead into the ship of Italy. Six months I wandered penniless from land to land, northward and westward, starving and freezing in the mountains, starving and scorching in the plains. Sometimes held captive, sometimes taking service of this man and of that. But at last I won to Fécamps, and, since they wanted seamen, found me a ship, and waited my chance for England. I saw you ride up to the dockside, and your passage money paid, and my heart leaped, for I knew you were for Sussex. Ho, Master Lobster-pot, the mist is lifting!"

Certainly the curtain about them was less dense. The wind was gathering vigour, bellying out bravely the boat's single sail. Overhead the whiteness of the fog was yielding to a faint blue. Suddenly, as if a sheet had been lifted, they

broke clear, and straight in front of them the sun shone on a line of undulating cliff.

"Fairlight by Hastings, as I live!" exclaimed Diccon, shifting the tiller till the freshening breeze came on their starboard quarter. "A clear run for Rother, masters!"

"And Winchelsea," said the knight. "I think I heard it was from Winchelsea these fellows came. I will not be carried into Rye."

"Your Worship pays the piper, and shall call the tune," said Diccon. "Winchelsea or Rye, it is all one to me. There was a girl I used to know at Winchelsea, and was on my way to her when I had the ill-luck to fall, with some hard-won silver, into the hands of your Worship's father's men, who pressed me so harshly to join their company that for the time I could do no other. But, meeting my captain by chance in your town of Lewes, I changed sides again before the battle, and my captain sent me with a certain convoy to Rye."

William de Warenne considered Lightfoot thoughtfully. "You are a debonair rascal," said he. "If you would take service with me again, and serve me as faithfully as you have served your captain, you should not complain of your reward."

"I thank your lordship. If God prospers me to rescue my captain from his present plight I may remember your lordship's offer."

"Man!" exclaimed de Warenne, "you are never so great a fool as to believe that you can rescue him?"

"God forbid!" answered Diccon. "But two hundred stout Portsmen might accomplish it, my lord."

"I will never believe there are so many madmen in Rye!"

"Then I must go farther afield, and the other Ports must make up the quota. But if old Roger Farr be still Bailiff, I will lay a wager with your Worship."

"And what is that?"

"That if within the month I sail not out of Rother with a fleet for the redemption of my captain and the other Ryers with him, I will deliver myself to your lordship at such place as you shall appoint, and be your sworn man thenceforth."

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The young knight laughed. "And what shall I put in pledge against your fleet's sailing?"

"Why, my lord, I have heard you say the Earl of Leicester's cause is doomed, and that the King's vengeance is about to fall on his enemies. Pledge me your word as a knight that if our Ryers bring back Captain Aylwin, and my captain is in danger of the King's vengeance, you will be pleased to forget that you and he were enemies, and remember only that he saved you and your noble father in your time of need."

"You are a cunning knave, by God!" said William. "There is a long score, look you, between your master and me."

"My lord, I thought it settled. But I speak of the King's justice, remembering that your Worship's house is great and powerful, and carried weight in the King's council. Will you wager me against my fleet of Rye that if our lord the King has the upper hand you will do what you may to save my captain from a rebel's doom?"

"So at one stroke you would snatch him from Saracens and from hangman?"

"I do but pledge my confidence against your Worship's."

"True. Well, if my vengeance risks to lose a weapon, my service stands to gain a faithful knave. I take the wager, Lightfoot. Madonna, what a sea is here! Have a care, man, or we founder!"

There had suddenly arisen about the boat a confusion of tumultuous waves, capped with breaking foam, and seeming to thrust all ways at once. Diccon, however, held the course undisturbed, swinging his tiller confidently to meet the tumbling crests.

"It is the Rother bar, Sir William, with wind and tide at issue. In a few minutes you shall tread land."

Fishermen Tom and Jack from their seat on the forward thwart had eyed Lightfoot uneasily as the boat began to plunge in the troubled water, but, quickly recognizing his competence as a pilot, they stayed stolidly in their places. The craft shouldered her way through the tumble into the river-mouth, and came without further adventure to the weed-hung piles of the town quay at Winchelsea.

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Climbing ashore, the two travellers made their way through the group of curious idlers by the waterside, and entered a labyrinth of narrow, ill-smelling alleys which lined the low-lying beach. Great gales and the flooding Channel tides had worked their will so often with old Winchelsea that for all her past fame the Port was well-nigh derelict. Most of her trade had passed to her more prosperous neighbour on the eastern hill across Rother, and though the next reign was to see a new Winchelsea, splendidly planned, on the western hill higher up the stream, that day was yet far off, and the great king who was to build new Winchelsea with a foresight ahead of his age was still a prisoner, hostage for his royal father's good behaviour.

With the scorn of a grand seigneur, young Warrene stood scowling at the miserable, weather-stained timbers of this decaying settlement on the flats, sniffing in disgust the all-pervading odours of fish and sea-garbage. "God help us!" he grumbled, "here is a foul midden for a man to land in! Small wonder your Portsmen of Winchelsea sail far afield! The marvel is that men should return to such a stinking den!"

"The sea hath dealt harshly with it, my lord. Yet landwards it is not so bad. Is your Worship for Pevensey?"

"My Worship is for getting out of Winchelsea as quickly as may be, good Lightfoot. These Portsmen, if I mistake not, are all damnable rebels like yourself, and it may be my face is known. When I was in France I listened one day in the ports there to a rascal on one of your Cinque Ports ships who sang a ribald lay of Lewes fight. There was a canto, I recall, which went thus:

"Sir Simon de Montfort hath sworn by his chin,
Had he now here the Earl of Waryn,
Should he never more come to his yin,¹
Nor with shield, nor with spear, nor with other gyn,²
To help of Windsor.

"It comes to my mind there may be some rascals of Winchelsea who would very gladly take word of my landing to Pevensey, where they say the young Simon, son of the

¹ Own.

² Weapon.

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old fox, is besieging Sir Peter of Savoy. Why, at this very moment these tarry rascals in the boat may be setting the hunt on my track ! ”

Diccon grinned. “ I have heard the same canticle as your Worship, and there was another verse which ran :

“ By God that is above us, he did much sin
That let pass over sea the Earl of Waryn.

“ And that is none other than my brave captain, whom, as your Worship knows, I helped do the deed. You are right : Winchelsea is no place for a great knight such as your lordship.”

“ Friend Lightfoot, if you can find so noble a beast as a horse in this pirates’ hold I will fill your hand with silver.”

Diccon held out a brown palm. “ Let your lordship sow the silver seed, you shall quickly see the harvest in horse-flesh. But if I know Winchelsea, you must sow ere you can reap.”

“ What if you take the silver, and leave me to the pirates ? ”

“ I hope I am an honest man,” said Diccon, frowning, “ but you must take your luck of that.”

“ Good fellow, I jested. Here is the money.”

“ It is too much,” said the sailor. “ Were I to display such wealth your Worship would be more like to choke than jest in Winchelsea. Wait here for me, and you shall soon be on your way.”

He disappeared into the warren of timbered houses, and was gone so long that de Warenne began to reconsider his confidence. A little group of the townsfolk had come together, staring curiously at the stranger standing in the filthy street, when Diccon reappeared with a far better mount than the knight had hoped to obtain in such unpromising surroundings. He led him up to Sir William, at the same time handing him a rough basket containing bread and meat. “ It may be far before your Worship finds a meal. A wise traveller goes provided,” said he. “ God prosper your Worship’s journey.”

“ If I said the same to you I should be praying against

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myself, that I might lose the chance of a faithful follower," laughed Sir William. "After a month we shall meet again."

"We shall see," answered Diccon. "But greatly I doubt it."

Sir William leaped to the saddle, and rode clattering over the cobbled ways, northward out of the town. When he had crossed Rother he turned neither toward Pevensey nor Lewes, but took the road for Udimore.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN UDIMORE THICKET

NORTHWARD from Winchelsea, due west from where Rye queens it at the river-mouth, and midway between the converging streams of Rother and Brede, a great dark wood reared walls of secrecy against the sunshine. Dense with tangled undergrowth among its close-set stems, hedged with thorn so tightly planted as to make a natural *chevaux de frise* right round its five-mile circuit, the Thicket of Udimore wrapped hill and hollow behind that rampart of thorn in a mystery of which the scattered peasantry between the rivers spoke with bated breath. The Thicket itself was old, very old, a part of that great forest which had existed over this countryside since before memory began. Even before the golden dragon of Wessex went down under the Norman spears at Battle it was said the Saxon lords of Udimore had conserved the Thicket when the forest about it was thinned, and since the conquest of King William successive Norman holders had prided themselves on preserving its fastness inviolate.

Rolf, the last lord, father of the Lady Adela, had been a man round whom legends grew. It was said he had brought back knowledge of the Black Art from the Crusades, and it was known he had been visited in the Thicket by Roger Bacon the Franciscan: "Doctor Admirabilis," as men called him in wonder and fear of his profundity of knowledge. "Doctor Admirabilis" had stayed long in the hidden house of Sir Rolf, and who knew what dark wizard rites had been practised in the Thicket! Might it not be due to sheer sorcery that Sir Rolf's daughter Adela, whose mother had been a mere London burgess's daughter, had grown a crea-

ture of such wayward loveliness as bewitched half the knight-hood of the shire, and delighted to sport with men as though they were toys? Wooers in plenty had come to the Thicket, lingering a longer or a shorter time while the Lady Adela took her pleasure of them, and then had taken their ways again home.

At length Sir Rolf, dying, left a strange testament, whereby his heiress must remain a ward of the Abbey of Robertsbridge, with maintenance and retain secured to her, but debarred from full inheritance of her lands until she should make up her lawless mind to wed. And since the old Crusader's death it was currently reported that the goings-on in the Thicket of Udimore had been such as to create a scandal in Christendom. Lovers still came and went, and the maddest tales were told of how the lovely Adela held them in her enchantment, feeding them with caresses or whipping them with disdain as the mood took her, yet yielding finally to none. Holy Church, drawing the rich harvest of her estates, and in no haste to lose them, stayed content, so folk said, with the mildest of admonitions—indeed, the tongue of scandal credited the lady with more than one Churchman in her toils.

Here and there, at widely separated intervals, a narrow gap in the rampart of thorn gave view of slim tracks winding inwards among the dense growth, under the dim arcaded branches. Tracks so narrow and twisting, and so hedged with deep cover, that a score of men might hold them against an army. And it was well known that the service of the Lady of Udimore was both strict and profitable, and that her spell was over her own men as well as strangers. None passed the Thicket against her will.

Riding solitary from Winchelsea on his borrowed horse, William of Warenne forded Brede a little southward of the Thicket, and presently beheld its heavy circle of green massed like an opposing army across his path. As he approached, under an oak-tree near the rough track he followed, a ragged swineherd looked up from tending his charges. The herder's dog, pricking his ears at the sound of strange footsteps, rushed threateningly upon the rider, yapping with bared

fangs. Reining his horse, Sir William whipped out his sword, and as the hound sprang sent it howling with a cut from the flat across the head. The herdsman, swinging up his staff, advanced from under the tree, but at sight of the bared sword stood scowling.

"Tell me, fellow," commanded Warenne, "if the Lady Adela is now at Udimore."

"What know I of ladies?" growled the man. "Who art thou, that killest poor men's dogs?"

"One that would kill you as readily, rascal. Therefore take heed. The cur is not dead, but has his lesson. Now answer." He dallied threateningly with his weapon.

The herdsman backed a pace. "I know not," he said surlily.

Sir William laughed, producing a coin. "This may help your knowledge and heal your brother's hurt."

At sight of the money the poor wretch's expression changed. "Noble sir, now I bethink me, I saw the lady ride forth no later than yesterday. Westward she rode in the morning with a goodly company, and in the evening returned with more."

"Why, that is good news, and here is your fee, man." Flinging the coin to the ground, the knight rode on into the Thicket.

He had not penetrated a hundred yards from the opening when a bowstring twanged near, and an arrow quivered in a great tree just ahead. "Who rides there?" a rough voice cried. "Halt, or the next shaft takes your horse!"

"Sir William of Warenne rides here. Come forth, damned archer!"

The bushes parted, and a tall fellow in Lincoln green blocked the path ahead of the knight, grinning broadly, and fingering a second shaft on the cord of his long bow.

"What, Peter? The fiend take thee! Hast forgotten me?"

The archer grinned more broadly. "I know your Worship well enough. But my lady is one that likes to be obeyed. We archers of the Thicket thrive best when we shoot quickest."

"Yet methinks your lady should find you better quarry than loyal knights."

"She may do that before long," chuckled the archer, "if all they say be true."

"And what do they say, thou mad marksman?"

"Many things, my lord. Such as your Worship doubtless knows better than I, who did not even know your Worship was back from abroad."

"I was not, till to-day. Take me to your lady, for I think I shall not be unwelcome. Meanwhile, tell me what they say in England."

Peter dropped his voice. "They say for one thing, my lord, that his Highness Edward the Prince hath escaped from the King's enemies at Hereford."

Sir William reined in his horse and stared at the archer with flashing eyes. "Now God and His Saints be praised!" he cried. "Peter, is this true?"

"My lord, the rumour flies across England, and is told with circumstance wherever the King's friends foregather."

"What circumstance?" asked the knight, riding slowly after his guide along the winding track.

"Circumstance to make the dead sit up and laugh," chuckled Peter. "It is said that my lord Thomas de Clare, the noble Earl of Gloucester, having fallen out with his master Earl Simon over the spoils of Lewes fight, was nevertheless appointed by Earl Simon, with certain other gentlemen, to attend our lord the Prince in his captivity. Thereon this doubting Thomas contrives to send his Highness, under a false name, a certain stallion, exceeding swift and strong, and so fiery that few would dare to ride him, though our Prince, as your lordship knoweth, rides like St Michael's self. And so, having concerted a plan with his friends, the Prince affects a wish to try his new horse's speed and behaviour against the horses of his escort, and thereby judge of the beast's fitness for a tourney. For which purpose they repair to a spot north of the town, where by fair words the Prince prevails on his companions to mount in succession, and gallop their horses against each other, so that he may test his own against their best. And so in sooth he did, for when

all the rest had galloped to exhaustion, our Lord Edward, who had stood watching them under a tree, holding in his straining stallion, suddenly strikes in his spurs. 'Sirs,' quoth he, 'greet well the King my father, and tell him how well I rode this day!' And now they say the Earl of Gloucester has joined himself with the Prince at Roger de Mortimer's castle of Wigmore, and all the fat is in the fire again."

"Now, by all the saints in Paradise," cried Sir William, "this is the best news ever I heard! Take me quickly to your lady, Peter, for I too have news, and she must hear it."

By now they had come through many windings to the inner edge of the Thicket. The dark green circle of the trees ringed in a wide open space, in the midst of which rose a turreted stone building, half castle, half manor, encircled by no wall, but by a deep moat, behind which ran a steep, high mound of earth, turf-covered. At one point rose the towers of a drawbridge. The archer drew a horn from his girdle and blew a loud blast, whereupon the drawbridge was lowered for their passage.

"You keep good discipline here, Peter," observed the knight.

"Discipline enough, and men enough too, Lord William. And we know where more are to be found when they are wanted, notwithstanding the young de Montfort besets Pevensey. Our lord the King has still his friends in Sussex."

"Meseems you are mightily well informed in the secrets of your lady, Peter."

The archer gave him a crafty look. "My lady hath her secrets, your Worship, but her loyalty to the King was never one of them. I dare swear your Worship will meet many here whom you will know."

They crossed the drawbridge. On the other side of the mound a company of archers were practising at targets. The whole enclosure had the air of a military camp, with tents spread, and smoke rising from many cooking-fires. Numerous horses were stalled in sheds near the manor, and smiths and armourers were at work.

They came to the stone stairway leading up to the door of the manor itself, raised a storey above the ground. A young

man descending the stair gave a joyful shout at sight of the newcomer, and, running down, caught de Warenne's hand.

"Sir William of Warenne! Welcome back to England! We have been expecting you, Lord William. But where is your company?"

"Ashburnham, I am alone. I must see the Lady Adela at once. I bring news from my father."

"This witch of Udimore!" The young noble laughed gaily. "Who would have thought a woman's wits could have brought together so many loyal swords in a shire overrun by traitors? Know you, my lord, we have fifty knights, and near a thousand men-at-arms within the magic circle of these woods, awaiting the leadership of your father's son?"

"That is good news, Ashburnham. Believe me, the harvest is at hand. But take me first to Lady Adela."

"With all my heart. Be pleased to follow."

Peter the archer retired. The others entered the fortress manor, and presently Ashburnham ushered Sir William into the solar, where a lady in gold-embroidered blue sat facing the window, her back to the door, so intent on a parchment before her that she did not look up at their entrance.

"Madame, here is Lord William of Warenne," said young Ashburnham. Still the lady did not turn.

Warenne took his companion by the arm. "Leave us, Ashburnham," he whispered.

The young man nodded and withdrew, and as the door closed behind him the Lady Adela rose and turned. Scarlet flamed in her face, but her blue eyes looked coldly on her guest.

"My lord of Warenne, I have done what your letter requested." Her tone was as level as though he had stepped from the next room to resume an interrupted conversation. The Earl's son strode toward her eagerly, but checked before her steely self-possession.

"Will you not give me welcome, Adela?"

"As I welcome every knight who serves our lord the King. Have you eaten and drunk, my lord?"

"My lord! Have you so soon forgotten, Adela?"

"I have forgotten many things," she answered. "Yet I remember some. I remember that I am wed."

"To a traitor!"

"The more need for me to prove my loyalty. And the proof of it your lordship may see in my poor house, where I have gathered such of the King's friends as I could against your coming. How many do you bring with you, Sir William?"

"Adela, I am alone."

"Alone! I did not so understand the letter. It spoke of your landing with a force to which your Sussex lieges and other knights should join themselves and march to aid the King."

"The accursed Leicester has his spies in every port of France. To keep my mission secret I was forced to embark secretly, my name unknown, bargaining to be set ashore at Pevensey. We knew not Savoy was besieged. Accident brought me to Winchelsea in a fishing boat, and I came straight hither. Adela, you were never so lovely!"

"Many have told me so," she answered coolly. "My husband is fortunate, is he not? And yet so blind and wilful he prefers a dark-haired wench of Rye! Is she as charming as they say, my lord?"

Warrenne flushed darkly under her ironical smile, yet met her taunting eyes. "I was a fool," he confessed. "Yes, she is fair, this Rosamund. Her beauty clean bewitched me."

"And his manhood, I think, bewitched me not a little," she answered, her colour mounting slowly, her voice deliberate and cool. "My husband may be a rebel, yet he is a very proper man." Her smile was like a goad. "When he returns——"

"He will never return!" the knight burst out.

She started, then laughed lightly. "You utter your hopes, perhaps, my lord, to prove my wifely devotion."

"Adela, I speak what I know. Captain Aylwin and all his company are prisoners of the Moors."

She was pale now, but against the conviction in his tone she made a last stand. "Prove it, William!"

"Prove it when you please. There is a man of his, one Lightfoot, who was in the ship that brought me hither. I knew him not till we were landed together, but the rascal knew me. This Lightfoot escaped, and after many adventures has come home, vowing to raise a fleet to rescue his master. A faithful knave, but mad, since nothing less than a Crusade can make the Saracens give up the Captain. Aylwin is as good as dead, Adela, if, indeed, he be not dead already."

The Lady of Udimore steadied herself, her back leaning on the wall of the sollar. She held her head high, and from her pale face the blue eyes glittered frostily upon Warenne. "One man, you say, has escaped from the Moors. If one, why not another?"

"Because that other, if he escapes, is doubly doomed. Because, Adela, the King comes to his own again, and Leicester's hour will presently strike. The Earl my father sailed a week since with ships and men to join the King's friends in Wales. Everywhere the loyal barons gather troops, while de Montfort's difficulties grow daily. From Sussex, thanks to you, I march with a good force to join Mortimer and the Marchers. I tell you, Leicester's pride will be humbled for ever before the year is out. Adela, consider well. When the bridge at London bristles with heads of traitors, and the lands and property of all rebels are in forfeit, will you not forget the husband who is dead and remember the lover who is living?"

"My lord," said Adela haughtily, yet with a new note of uncertainty in her voice, "we know each other, you and I. Do I hear a threat behind your words?"

"Only this, sweetheart—that you must one day be Countess of Warenne."

"Must?"

"Must," answered Sir William, though the compulsion of the word was tempered by entreaty. "As wife of a proscribed rebel, a captain in the Navy of the Ports who bore arms against the King, your lands of Udimore will be forfeit. Yet since yourself have loyally served the King in his adversity, and your husband is dead, your lands may be spared to you—through a more loyal husband."

"But Garth Aylwin is not dead!"

Warrenne made an impatient gesture. "Why play with words?" he cried. "The man is doomed—what matter whether by Saracen slave-whips or the King's headsman? Tell me this, Adela: if you knew him dead in fact, would you wed with me?"

"And serve as handmaid to the Bailiff's daughter!" said Adela with curling lip.

"No, by the Mass! Adela, I have confessed. The girl bewitched me. But she has cured me herself. Know you how we fled to Rye, and paid our passage to France?"

The Lady of Udimore nodded. A faint smile moved her pale lips. "A clever wench, that Rosamund whom Garth loves. Yet she too has lost him." She walked slowly to her seat by the table, and buried her face in her hands. After a while she looked up, mistress of herself, resolutely challenging the dark eyes of Warrenne, baffling him with her light laugh. "Most noble knight, shall we be candid with each other?"

"Why be otherwise, my Adela?"

"I am not your Adela. But it seems you think I may be. Therefore answer me this: do you desire Adela or Udimore?"

"Both," said Sir William bluntly.

"And which the more urgently, dear Will?"

"In sooth, Adela herself. For though the lands of Udimore are wide, de Warrenne's are wider. Moreover, lands may be seized by the sword, or by craft, or by the word of kings, but Adela of Udimore can be held only where she gives herself."

"*Bon Dieu!* Where learned you such wisdom, my lord? From Rosamund of Rye?"

The knight shrugged at this irony. "Suffice that I have learned it," he said.

"And the honesty to utter it," she added more gently. "Now, since you think I may become your Countess, and we are to deal in truth, I say I almost learned to love this Captain Aylwin. Folly, but pleasant folly, Will. For him, had he loved me, when you turned from me, I might have given up all."

"All what, madame?"

"The greatness of my career," she answered proudly, and then laughed at the astonishment in his face. "Because a woman cannot ride to war, and her beauty is prize for the strongest, think you she cannot carve her career? God, how simple you are—you who would make me Countess of Warrenne!"

"Because I love you, Adela."

"Most noble knight, who made you love me? Long ago I chose love for my weapon, and studied to use it well. My father—God rest his soul—was learned in many arts, and much he taught me, but all his learning went to edge this weapon of mine. Many lovers I have had, and learned from them the secrets of men's hearts, but without showing them the secrets of mine. For though I loved them all a little, my head was always colder than my heart. They gave me reputation. They called me witch. Minstrels began to sing of me. And the more they spoke of me, the more my suitors came, and the greater grew their names, and still I kept a cool head governing my warm blood, telling myself that when I found one great enough to suit me he should have me, and that till then I would be free. But to be free I must be mistress of my father's lands, which by my father's testament I could become only through my husband. One day you came—William of Warrenne, earl that is to be. And here first my weapon began to show its double edge, for as we wandered through these woods together, you and I, Will, my head was no longer cold enough—why should I not admit it? And so my weapon lost its power—you found the spell too light, and broke away." Her candid smile made the knight's blood run faster. He took a quick step toward her, but she motioned him aside.

"And a strange chance befell us both. You, in whom love had kindled, but not yet flamed, met this enchantress of Rye. And I, hoping to win complete freedom by wedding a dying man, found him revive, and turning my proper weapon against myself. And so, it seemed, my career was ended." Her laugh broke, but her blue eyes stayed bright.

"No, indeed, but begun!" cried Warenne ardently. "If you will be my Countess!" He kneeled before her.

She smiled down at him enigmatically. "If we gain the end we strive for, the lands of one whose husband is a rebel will be forfeit. So faithful a baron can obtain them for the asking, and with a nobler bride win a far richer dowry."

"God help me, Adela, for your lands I care nothing now, so I have you! But if your lands are forfeit, what will become of you? Let us face things as they are."

"You mean as they may be," she amended. "Leicester is a hard nut to crack."

The young man came closer, and seized her hand, which lay cold in his hot clasp. "Promise me this only—that when the King's cause triumphs, and the Churchmen shall have swept away any impediment which may remain, you and I shall wed. Adela, to rule at Lewes Castle is no such poor career!"

His dark eyes blazed with kindling passion, and something of the banished colour returned to the lady's face. The blue-gold dress on her bosom stirred with her quickened breathing. Smiling, she drew away.

"I am too soft. All this because we walked these woods together! We speak of forfeiture, my lord, yet at the worst Adela of Udimore is not unfriended. The King himself will learn who raised men for his cause in Sussex under the eyes of his enemies. And our lord Prince Edward, who himself slew in error my brave and loyal uncle under de Montfort's standard—does he not owe me something more than gratitude? Ambition, Will, may yet beckon me with jewelled fingers."

"It cannot lead you higher than to be Countess of Warenne," said the young knight, his tone both proud and pleading. "Let cool head side with warm heart, Adela. Let me carry your favour in battle against the rebels!"

Provokingly calm, Adela allowed her downward gaze to consider his pleading face, and slowly measured out her words. "Lord William, shall I commit my favour into hands I may not trust? It is the second time you have raved to me of love, and flattered my poor beauty on your

knees. And in the interval you have forgotten me and spent your protestations on another. My father the Crusader taught me a good conceit of myself, which I would maintain. Never have I lowered it, save to one whom you know of. If I have worked and plotted for you, it is because I served my own cause in doing so—and perhaps a little because of other days. But I will be no knight's toy. If I offer you a pledge, it is with conditions."

"Adela, they are agreed before you speak them!"

"Be not too sure!" Mockery crept into her smile. "I must have a gift of betrothal."

"It is yours, Adela!"

"Not yet!" answered the lady. "But when the King is firm again on his throne, and all rebels are proscribed, then bring me Rosamund of Rye with a rope about her neck, for me to hang her if I please, or set her, if I please, to wash dishes with the bond-women in my kitchens. Then I may be your Countess if you still desire me!"

There flashed upon the knight's brain the picture of humiliation in the Bailiff's hall at Rye. He stood up unabashed. "Since that is your fancy, Adela, it should not be hard to satisfy. You shall have her when we sack that rebel port, and the old traitor her father shall be thrown in for make-weight."

"For Roger Farr I care nothing," she answered, "but see that I have his daughter." And with a gleam of the blue eyes she added, "And see that no other has her before me!"

Sir William flushed. "By St Thomas of Canterbury, that was a needless taunt!"

Coolly she retorted, "Was it so?"

The challenge of her scornful beauty fanned the young exile's passion to flame. With a stride he had her in his arms, half choking her with his kisses. "Oh," he panted, "you are a fit mate for a Warenne, my lovely tigress! By the bones of the Conqueror, you shall have your victim—she has turned my folly into hate!—and you shall have a score of the damned Ryers with her, in chains, barons and freemen as they may call themselves, to bear your bridal litter to Lewes!"

She struggled free at last, and, half in anger, half in triumph, smoothed her broidered dress and glanced in his blazing eyes.

"The sooner you join the King, my lord, the sooner these things may come to pass," she told him.

"Find me armour and a good horse, Countess mine, and to-morrow I ride for the Marches!"

"Armour and a horse you shall have, but you will hardly march to-morrow. Most fiery champion, a thousand men do not so easily take the road. I have made all ready against your promised coming, but our friends in Sussex must be warned. A week from to-day you shall ride with full provision. But see you do not fall in by the way with the young de Montfort, for if our news be true his father must recall him soon from Pevensey to help him at his need."

"We will deal with the whelp when we have dealt with the sire, and root out the brood of traitors. Meanwhile we will march ahead of him to the West. I think"—De Warenne laughed derisively—"young Simon will find thin faring in our track. But I, Adela, shall be a starving man till I come again to Udimore."

The lady swept him a mocking curtsy. "Hungry wolves are bravest, Will. But here in my poor house good knights fare well enough. Come, and while you refresh yourself you shall meet your loyal friends."

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE'S ARMADA

IN the garden of the Bailiff's house at Rye Roger Farr sat with his daughter on a bench under a shady tree, and stared at the brown, keen face of Diccon Lightfoot, standing before them on the sward. Legs a little astraddle and arms akimbo, head thrust eagerly forward, Diccon waited, with his eyes on the old man. His tale was ended, but the Bailiff had sat so long silent that a sudden doubt of his answer shot a chill to the sailor's heart.

The jurat avoided looking at his daughter, whose face had blanched, whose white fingers gripped hard on the bench, whose eyes were big with horror.

"God save you, Master Farr, are you struck dumb?" demanded Diccon at last, unable longer to hold his impatience.

Roger shook his grey head. "This is very bad news, Master Lightfoot, very bad news indeed!"

"So bad it needs quick mending," answered Diccon. "'If I live, I will bring rescue,' was what I said to my master. Well?"

"That is easily said, good Diccon, but less easily done."

Rosamund's white face turned from the sailor to the Bailiff. "Nevertheless, done it must be, my father." Her tone was quiet and level, yet when she rose and stood beside Diccon, and laid a hand on his big arm, he felt the hand tremble.

Old Roger met with a look of pity the grey eyes shining darkly down from under her black brows. "Child," said he, "these tidings must be faced, with all they mean. Life is no fairy-tale, and sometimes it strikes us hard. Consider:

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this voyage is of four hundred leagues—a perilous journey even to a peaceful haven—and the place, by Diccon's telling, is strong and well provided."

"It is better worth the sacking!" said the girl, with heaving breast and flashing eyes.

The Bailiff raised a mildly protesting hand. "A thousand men and a score of armed ships would scarce do such a deed."

"By your leave, Master Farr," broke in Lightfoot, "six ships and two hundred stark seamen would do the business. Find me these, and I will take them where they may land unseen by night from the boats, and with the blessing of God and a few coils of line I will have them within that pagan hold before the heathen can scream '*Allah akbar!*'"

"Dick," said the old man gravely, "I call you faithful heart and gallant fighter, but there is more in this than seems to strike you. Master Aylwin, as all men know, is a great captain——"

"The greatest in the Ports, Bailiff!"

"Nevertheless, these infidels and renegades have captured and enslaved him."

"By an evil chance, Master Farr, such as might befall any man."

"Such as might befall, therefore, your six ships and your two hundred Portsmen. Where the greatest fails, the lesser may fail more easily. But set that for a moment aside. Weigh this well, my Rose. Captain Aylwin, carrying with him a letter to the Holy Father, and a goodly treasure to gild the letter withal, falls with letter and treasure into the hands of the Saracens, or, rather, of this pirate horde swept up from the scum of many lands, whom Diccon hath described. For nigh a year he hath been a galley-slave. Where is now his letter and his treasure? Indeed, the man himself may well be dead. Child, even were it possible—which I much doubt—to rescue him if still living, we should bring him home still the husband of another woman. He could not have you, Rose."

"Could he not? If you say so, Father, you know neither him nor me."

The Bailiff shook his grey head, and smiled sadly. "Rose, Rose, the old know more than the young give them credit for. What are men's courage and women's love against the will of God."

"What!" cried Rosamund. "Do you say it is God's will that Garth and his men should rot in heathen slavery? Father, for shame! So did not folk answer when Peter Hermit drew all Christendom to save Christ's Holy Sepulchre. Are you Bailiff of Rye, and will leave our bravest captain to die a slave to Saracens?"

"Well said, mistress!" Lightfoot glowered at old Roger. "Bailiff, thou durst not do it!"

"Silence, sirrah!" Master Farr gave the sailor a stern look. "Being Bailiff, I must set the weal of my town before all other things. What if I persuaded a fleet to sail, and the fleet were lost? The Brotherhood of the Ports would say I had pawned the public weal to retrieve a private woe."

"By Our Lady!" broke in Diccon angrily, "I warrant the Brotherhood of the Ports will not hold the loss of Captain Aylwin a private woe, Master Farr!"

"Peace, hothead! Rose, my child, consider the state of England at this present. The Earl of Leicester hard beset by enemies. The King's party strengthening daily—has not Diccon here told of the coming of the wolf-cub of Warene, one sign of many that the King's friends hope to raise the country against the de Montforts and set all England again under the harrow of oppression? At any time, if the good Earl meet disaster, we may have an army at our gates. I am Bailiff, responsible for the liberties of the Port. How shall we maintain them with half our seamen on a wild-goose chase at the world's end?"

"Hear me, Bailiff Farr!" cried Diccon, taking a forward stride, and sticking out a lean jaw grim with scorn while he hammered the palm of one brown hand with the fist of the other. "You say you are responsible for the liberties of Rye. I say I am responsible for the liberties of my master and his fellows, and I say that King and Earl may settle their quarrel as they will, but the Ports shall send ships to succour my captain. Oh, there is loot enough to

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salt the enterprise in the palace of that renegade chieftain. Loot to make the fortune of a city."

"And stout fighters to defend it, I make no doubt," answered Farr. "How if your captain is dead, fellow? How if the infidels, finding themselves attacked, massacre every prisoner in his chains? I too have voyaged abroad, and I have known such things. How if they sight your fleet and sink it, and thrust the mariners into their slave-pens? How if a tempest scatter your bones on the rocks of Spain ere ever you come near the heathen hold?"

"If! If! If!" thundered Diccon, now thoroughly roused. "I will give your Worship one more to your collection. How if my brave captain, learning that Mistress Rosamund here was captive to the foul Warennnes, had answered me, 'The girl, good Diccon, is most likely ravished ere now by that damned villain knight, and the saving of her is in any case impossible.' My captain would have been Lord of Udimore this day. And where your worship and your fair daughter would be, God only knoweth."

A faint flush came into the Bailiff's thin cheek. "A shrewd thrust that, Master Lightfoot. Man, think not I hesitate to risk my own ships, though I have but two this moment in the Port. But how can I go to other captains and say, 'Good friends, bestir yourselves to save Captain Garth Aylwin. He was to have wed my daughter, who loveth him well, but by mischance he was wed to another, and, being on his way to repair the error, fell captive to the Mediterranean pirates. Pray you rescue him for her.'"

"No!" cried Rosamund, crimson sweeping her face and neck. "You cannot say, 'Rescue him for her.' But you can say: 'Rescue him for our Ports.' And, remember, it is not only Captain Aylwin that is to be saved."

"Other ships of Rye have been taken by the infidels. Did ever Bailiff of Rye send a fleet to rescue them before?" The old man threw out his hands protestingly. "Child, they call us barons equal in honour to the Norman lords. A baron should set his faith before his inclination. The Ryers put their trust in me."

"So did my captain," said Diccon, "when he left with

your Worship the treasure he brought home. Let your Worship pay out my captain's treasure to save the lives of my captain and my comrades. I promise you, the pagans shall bounteously repay it!"

"Alas! Captain Aylwin took with him the greater part of his treasure to fee the Church, my friend. A small part only remains with me for his ransom. And as for my own wealth—which God knoweth I would freely pledge to serve my daughter—it is small enough since war has raged in the land, and the voyages of my ships have been few and difficult. No, we have no longer the means to offer ransom, and, if we had, what would prevent the pagans from seizing ransom and ships as well?"

"I spoke of no ransom," answered Diccon scornfully. "Preach a Crusade, Master Bailiff. Send a fighting fleet. Attack this cursed renegade by night. Burn his town about his ears, and bring back my master and our brethren and all the treasure of the palace and the town. That is our Portsmen's way, Master Farr!"

"That would be Garth's way," said Rosamund.

"Child, child, it cannot be! The plan is mad—God knows it is impossible!" The old man's anxious eyes besought his daughter, but Rosamund drew her tall young figure erect.

"No!" she exclaimed. "You shall not persuade me!" She flung out her arm, and with an appealing gesture pointed to the church that crowned the hill of Rye. "Yonder in God's own house I have heard a braver saying: 'Have faith and all is possible.' By that truth I will stand. My father, your ships are yours to order as you will, but this say I, whom our men have trusted in a difficult time: I myself will go with Diccon here through Rye and Winchelsea, and the other Ports, and will call our captains to follow with swords where a woman leads with faith. This I swear to Our Lady, Star of the Sea!"

"By the five wounds!" exclaimed Diccon Lightfoot, with blasphemous fervour, "after such a leader our Portsmen would sail through the fiery neck of hell! Bailiff, the ships shall sail! Age has turned your blood to water, Master Farr."

Love's Armada

"To lead, I think," old Roger answered sadly. "Rose, will you shame me through the Ports?"

"Nay," answered Rosamund smiling. "I will say, 'My father is old, else he would fight to save his brethren. And since he has no son his daughter will show you the way.' And I am very sure we shall not lack for seamen or for ships."

"You mean this, Rose?"

"Father, I have sworn it!" said the girl in exaltation. "And, now I think of it, it comes to me that this is the key that will unlock that Moorish prison. Those sea-dogs of ours must have a leader of the pack. Only faith can kindle a Crusade, and I will kindle ours, for the faith in victory is mine. Other faith may waver in the long journey, but mine cannot, being built on love."

The old Bailiff, aghast at her resolution, and feeling his powerlessness to break it, nevertheless made one last stand.

"Child, you talk mad knight errantry. Let us grant the adventure possible. Let us forget the hardships of the sea, the savage perils to be shared with ungentle men, the wildness, incredible to a woman, of the life of fighting shipmen. Let us, I say, put all this and much more aside, and suppose your fairy-tale come true, your rescue made. What have you achieved? Your lover is wed and bound. Your love must stay barren, in spite of all your suffering."

"And if so," cried Rosamund with shining eyes, "by that same assurance my faith is justified! And my love's reward shall be the service of him I love. Father, say no more. I must go. But I would go with your blessing on our enterprise."

"Girl, you cannot go!" The old man's voice was petulant and shaken now.

"I must and will," said Rosamund.

"If I forbid you?"

"Love cannot be forbidden."

"And daughter's duty?"

"I have performed it, Father," the girl answered proudly. "In performing it I sent Garth to peril and slavery, and I must bring him back: him and the others with him. Will you bless me, Father?"

The Keys of England

Roger looked from his girl's shining eyes to the grim, gaunt face of Aylwin's second in command, and knew himself beaten. He spread out his hands. "Since I must yield, I yield," said he. "Force I might employ to prevent this madness, but for force against my child I have no heart. I will say no more. May God protect you, Rose, and bring you back to me. You shall have my ships and what of treasure I can give. Child, this is a bitter day!"

Rosamund kneeled and took his hands in hers. "It would have been bitterer without your blessing, Father. God keep you safe to watch for our return!"

So it befell that a strange Crusade was preached through the Five Ports by Diccon Lightfoot and the Bailiff's daughter. And what with the magic of romance in Rosamund's own appeal, and the name and fame of her seaman lover, and Master Lightfoot's tales of the plunder to be reaped in that renegade's hold, and the reckless, restless spirit of the adventurous Portsmen themselves, there sailed from Rother mouth at midsummer not six but eight bold captains with Diccon. And in Diccon's ship sailed Rosamund, the soul of that expedition, with one old serving-woman to keep her in countenance with all that fighting fleet. Down Channel they blew before a brave north-easter which sprang up to speed their voyage, and old Roger Farr, from his room overlooking the sea, watched the square sails dwindle to dots on the green highway, and for all the anxiety of his heart his old blood warmed a little with pride. For after all he was a baron and freeman of Rye.

And so Diccon Lightfoot did not go to the house of Warenne.

CHAPTER XX

THE PIRATE ISLES

THE day the Genoese ships escaped from the pirates was an evil one for the captives who rowed the *Royal Richard* and the other ships of the outlaw flotilla. Sullen and savage, with depleted crews and damaged vessels, the marauders, a mixed assemblage of rascality from the lands of Europe and Africa, made their way back over the blue Mediterranean to their lair. There were broken oars among the rowers, and empty, blood-stained benches where the chained galley-slaves had perished, helpless, in the battle. The survivors, their bare backs scarred and raw from the pitiless lash of the overseers, toiled the more grievously at their task. Down the middle of the Rye ship the pirates, in converting her to their purpose, had run a light gangway for the slave-drivers to pass up and down, and again and again, as the swarthy bully passed the bench where Captain Aylwin tugged at his oar, the long whip bit viciously on the back of the man whose bench companion had taken the desperate plunge overboard, each blow flavoured with mocking taunts on the fate awaiting him ashore as a suspected accomplice.

The sun sank in the sea, and the blue waves turned to blackness, but there was no respite for the captives. Under the brilliant stars the long, heavy oars held their ceaseless swing, the lash cracked, and the ships ran on for the haven.

Day had come again when they sighted the rocky citadel from which they had set out, perched on a height of one of the smaller islands of the Balearics. Here was the hold of

their masters, a mongrel band of sea-hawks, one of those many nests of pirates who had flocked hither from Algerine coasts, from Greece, the Italian islands, and Spain, spreading terror through the Western Mediterranean. Never before had piracy been organized on so formidable a scale as now in these sun-kissed isles. Forty years previously Don Jaime of Aragon had sailed with a great fleet of galleys and seized the port of Palma and the large island of Mallorca, but the kingdom he had founded there was far too busy maintaining itself to concern itself with the smaller islands, where the strong hand continued to reap its lawless rewards and reckless adventurers gathered from every land.

The early morning sun was flooding the little harbour as the beaten ships came to the mole and the crews disembarked. The outwearied rowers, careless of victory or defeat, rolled, all chained as they were, from their benches to the greasy decks, and slept like dogs till their drivers should summon them to their dens ashore. From the fishing huts by the mole and from the little walled town on the height a few men had come to watch the landing. It was early yet for the townsfolk to be abroad, though, had the ships returned with victory, the silence of the morning would have been rent with barbarous tumult, and all the population have been on the beach to grace their admiral's triumph.

Almost in silence the scowling crews climbed the steep track to a gateway in the wall. Their feet, bare or shod with rope sandals, made no sound on the rocky path. Some wore the turban and the wide breeches of the Moor, some the open-breasted waistcoat and the coloured sash. Many were wounded, and limped between their comrades with rough bandages about their heads and limbs, and of those that were whole there were few that did not show some mark of the recent struggle.

Not for long were the weary oarsmen left to the bliss of unconsciousness. Awakened by shrill whistles and the crack of the whips, they stumbled to their feet, waiting passively as cattle while the fetters were loosed which held them to their benches, and then were driven ashore like oxen that

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had done their task. No need here to fear escape, with the blue sea spreading to the horizon on every side!

The steep pathway to the sea-hawks' hold zigzagged up the rocky face, sometimes open on its outer side, sometimes, where the drop was more precipitous, guarded by a low stone barrier. At the top it swung in a sharp curve to the inner gate, the outer rim of the curve edged with a two-foot wall overhanging a drop to the naked rocks far below.

The weary convoy had reached the shadow of the gateway when there sounded suddenly from within a clamour of battering hoofs, a woman's shriek, and the hoarse shouting of men. Into the frame of the gateway flashed from the town a galloping white horse, foam flying blood-flecked from distended nostrils, ears laid back into tossing mane, on the high Moorish saddle a woman's figure clinging desperately, her veil streaming behind, her bright robes disordered, and her hair loose in a black cloud. A few more leaping strides, and panic-stricken brute and rider must plunge to destruction over the low barrier.

Guards and captives alike sprang instinctively from the onswEEPing death. But Aylwin, in the tail of the line, launched himself in a reckless abandonment at the white horse's head. Nothing knew he, nor cared, of horse or rider; neither chivalry nor hope moved his exhausted muscles to the spring; the sound of the thundering hoofs, the sight of the black hair flying, evoked a merely instinctive response from a life's discipline in meeting emergencies to the stimulus of sudden need.

The oblique shock of his heavy impact, the ruthless wrench of his toil-hardened sinews on the bit, flung the runaway against a projection of rock outside the gate. The cobbled pathway sparkled about the frantic hoofs, and while the woman shot clear, and miraculously unhurt, horse and man went down in a struggling heap. An English comrade, recovering nerve in the nick of time, seized Aylwin's ankle and dragged him from the lashing heels.

Shaken and dazed, breathing hard and spitting dust and blood, Garth sat up in the gate and glowered around,

baffled by his own escape. Already his fellow-captives were dumbly re-forming their straggling line, hustled by the guards, who cast scared glances meanwhile through the gate, from within which the clatter of other hoofs was growing.

A savage-featured Moor strode up to Aylwin and jabbed him with a dagger. "Get up quickly, oh misbegotten one! By Allah, thou hast put all our lives in jeopardy! The master comes, and fearful will his wrath be. Get up, I say!"

The dagger was drawn back to thrust more shrewdly when through the gate rode one at sight of whom all stood rigid. A huge, grizzle-bearded man of almost giant's stature, with wisps of greying hair sticking from under a black silken kerchief twisted turban-wise about his head, bestrode a powerful black horse, with trappings of rich scarlet and gold, and threw the beast on its haunches as he halted suddenly midway of the gate. The horse was in a lather of sweat, and its flanks dripped crimson drops on the cobbles as it stood. The rider's face was both fierce and cunning, and his small eyes, vicious as an angry bull's, glared round the triangle of the fallen horse, the woman just risen to her feet, and the Englishman still on the ground.

"What is this, dogs?" he rasped, his gaze riveting at last on Aylwin, who still sat with labouring breath, and returned him stare for stare.

The Moor with the dagger made deep obeisance. "Master, be pleased to hear me. The white mare here, bearing yonder moon of delight"—he bent obsequiously, but without looking round toward the still unveiled woman—"was descending through the gate when this son of perdition"—here he administered a kick to the seated man—"instead of standing aside with the rest of the slaves to give the lady passage, was suddenly possessed with ten thousand devils and flung himself like a whirlwind upon the poor animal, which fell before his attack as a stricken tree falls before the storm. Brothers, is this not true?" He spoke in Arabic, the common language of the pirates, and turned appealingly to his companions.

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"True, master, most true!" The other slave-drivers grasped at the happy inspiration of their colleague to clear them of possible blame. From the English captives rose cries of dissent. The white mare struggled to her feet and stood trembling.

"See, master," the slave-driver proceeded to embroider his story, "behold the mare, how at sight of that wicked one she quakes with fear. Say, what shall be done? Shall I pierce his throat?" Smiling persuasively, the rascal caressed his dagger. The woman stood watching without word or movement. Now the danger had passed the colour was returning to her face, which was of a sombre yet delicate beauty, a little contemptuous, soft in its outlines, yet touched with a certain cruelty.

The horseman turned on her, scowling. "Isabel, wanton, veil yourself!" She drew the filmy veil carelessly across the lower part of her face, leaving exposed her black eyes and her brows of tinted olive. With supple step she approached the white mare and stroked the quivering flank.

The rider turned his hot eyes on the Moor waiting with ready dagger, and thence to the Moor's intended victim, callously eyeing him from the ground. Back he glanced at the anxious Moor, and relaxed into a grin. "By Allah, Achmed, thy dagger hath a thirst that makes me covetous! Yet if thou speakest truth, we must first take means to exorcize the devils from this sullen dog. Isabel, light of my soul, what sayest thou?"

"Of what, lord?"

"Of the words of Achmed. Are they true?"

"They are lies."

"Ah! And the truth?"

"This slave here saved my life, as any may see. What is thy name, slave?" She turned for the first time to bend a glance on her rescuer. Black eyes and blue met in an unflinching stare before the captive spoke.

"My name is Garth Aylwin."

"It shall be remembered," she answered, coolly turning from him.

All this had passed in the Arabic of the corsairs, but at the mention of that name the master-outlaw straightened on his horse. "By the bones of Lewinna! Say that name again, man!" This time his words were clearest English.

The captive, galvanized to furious energy, leaped to his feet.

"Garth Aylwin is my name!" he cried. "God in heaven, man, are you English, and will hold Englishmen in slavery?"

The bandit laughed. "Gently, gently, Master Garth Aylwin! I think you have done me a service which may be useful to you. But trust you not too deeply in English tongue or English blood. Here in the islands a man's worth is the strength of his arm, and not the colour of his skin, and heathen talk best fits our heathen trade." He dropped back into the Arabic, looking to Isabel. "Flower of my eyes, tell me more of this."

"Indeed, Marco," she answered, "the greater part thou dost already know. How, as we returned from riding, there stood one at the courtyard gate who should have gladdened thee with news of victory, but who brought instead a bandaged arm that dripped blood as he told of defeat. The smell of blood affrighted this gentle Zubeida"—she stroked the mare's white muzzle—"and before I could hold her she bolted through the town. Her terror increased as she fled with the shouting of thy men returning from the ships, and she rushed through the gate like a creature possessed. I screamed, as a woman will when Death looks in her eyes too suddenly, for I saw the parapet before me. These dogs"—she swept a contemptuous arm toward the slave-drivers and their charges—"scattered like sheep lest they should stay my path to destruction. All save this fellow, who threw himself at the mare with a strength of very madness, and flung us to earth. And since it has pleased Our Lady—I mean our lord Allah—to cover us with the mantle of protection, I and Zubeida are alike unhurt, save that Zubeida has scratched her shoulder on the rock."

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"Great is the mercy of Allah!" observed the master, with massive piety. "But what of the man?"

"What man, lord?"

"Why, cruel one, he who saved thee, risking his life."

"The galley-slave?" The woman turned a seemingly careless glance toward the gaunt figure of the captive. "The lives of such are of little account. Yet I would have him rewarded, lord."

"He shall be," promised the rider. "But not with your dagger, Achmed. Give your dagger to the slave."

The wretched Moor had seen the smile of ferocious humour accompanying the command. He flung himself on the ground before his master. "Mercy, lord!" he cried.

The huge man's eyes lit with a gleam of enjoyment. "The lying dog asks mercy! Ask it, Achmed, from him whose life thou wouldst swear away. Give the dagger to the oarsman!"

The Moor looked into the pitiless face, and read an irrevocable sentence; saw, too, on the faces of his comrades and the captives a grim acquiescence. With the fatalism of his race he rose and proffered the weapon to his prisoner. "Strike quickly," he muttered, "and Allah guide thy hand!"

Aylwin stood unmoving, the dagger loose in his fingers.

"Lord," laughed Isabel, "the poor fool is overcome with thy munificence. Take thy reward, slave, and give thanks to the master."

Aylwin raised the dagger, considering for a moment the keen steel point. Then with a shrug he tossed it over the parapet. In the silence that followed the clink of its falling came up from the lower rocks. Achmed the Moor stared in incredulous amazement.

The fierce eyes of the master flashed. "Dog, do you reject my gifts?"

Aylwin gave him back a sombre stare. "It came to my mind," he said slowly in English, "to plant it in thy heart. It was thy English tongue that saved thee against thy deserts. It would have been easy."

The stalwart brigand considered the distance between them, and nodded coolly. "Aye, it would have been easy—for one that feared not death. Do you not fear death, Master Aylwin?"

The prisoner gave a short, bitter laugh, but answered not a word. Marco considered him again.

"Perhaps you sought death in saving the woman?"

"I sought nothing. Death comes when death is ready."

"True. Art a philosopher, man. Death is a subtle flirt, evading the embraces of her lovers, but lying in wait for such as shiver under her icy glances." He resumed in Arabic to the woman. "This selfish one, Isabel, says he considered neither thee nor me. Therefore we owe him nothing. Remains this lying dog Achmed, who would have watched thee broken on the precipice, and when thy beauty was mangled on the rocks would have deceived me with his specious tongue. How shall we deal with him, my soul?"

"Restore him to his dagger, lord, and let us begone."

"What! Restore his dagger to such a craven cur?"

The Moor, starting between hope and fear, fastened his gaze on the girl's haughty, indolent face in a passion of entreaty. The eyes of Isabel smiled above her veil.

"Lord, I said not so. A liar should learn the truth. If Achmed be restored to his dagger he will understand that danger from which by the mercy of Allah I was spared."

The bearded rider turned in his saddle to stare at her; then with a ferocious grin struck his hand upon his thigh. "A just judgment, O pearl of wisdom! 'Restore him to his dagger!' By my head, it shall be done, that all may learn that none lieth twice to Marco the Dey. Seize him, there, and throw him over the wall to find his dagger!"

Half a dozen men flung themselves on the Moor, who, struggling desperately, was borne backward toward the rampart. At their first rush the girl lightly mounted the white mare, and sat watching the struggle. Her veil had slipped with the movement, and as she sat absorbed in the spectacle the red tip of her tongue moistened her smiling lips.

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Achmed was forced against the parapet. A moment more and, raised from the ground by a dozen sinewy arms, he was hurled, shrieking, to the rocks below.

Isabel replaced her veil, and turned her horse's head "Lord, let us return to the palace," said she.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PALACE WELL

FOR several weeks the island fleet had not put to sea. Tied beside the mole, or drawn up on the hard sand of the beach, the ships lay undergoing refit at the hands of the Dey's shipwrights after the rough handling they had received in their last fight. The crews, both bond and free, were kept busy at the work from morning to night, and Garth Aylwin laboured with the rest. Always, as he worked, he revolved the one problem which had dominated his mind since the disaster of his capture: the means of his escape.

Each morning the gang of captives—there were others besides the Ryers—was marched down to the shore from their underground den at the base of a watch-tower. Each night they were driven back and every man chained by the ankle to an iron ring in the wall. Those whose labour was not required in the ships were driven to the island quarries, where some hewed great slabs of stone, which others dragged under the lash on rollers to the town, where they were used for the strengthening of the walls or the enlargement of Marco's fortress-palace.

The town, such as it was, contained, with the exception of a few cultivators, practically the entire population of the small island. It was a mere feudal adjunct of the fortress, and straggled, a confused jumble of old and new, over the crest of the hill which dominated the tiny port. It was scarcely fortified at all on the landward side, for the haven was the island's only anchorage, and round the rest of the few miles of coast the rocky cliffs dropped almost sheer to the sea, with here and there a tiny beach at a precipice's foot.

Since the discovery of his master's nationality Captain

The Palace Well

Aylwin had taken a new hold on hope. Nothing, indeed, had occurred to help that hope to grow, but he had kept ears and eyes open, steeling himself, and where he could his English comrades, against the abandonment of despair. Scraps of talk, gleaned during the months of their barbarous captivity, had put him in possession of the main outline of the island's recent history. Thus he had learned that the Dey Marco was himself a newcomer. His predecessor had conducted business on a smaller scale. Two ships only had formed that predecessor's pirate navy, and one day they had caught a Tartar. Falling upon a stranger vessel making for the Barbary coasts, they had discovered when already too late that they had bitten off more than they could chew. For the stranger was manned by a mixed crew of desperadoes, who after a fierce fight had possessed themselves of both the attacking ships. The strangers' leader, Marco himself, had given his defeated enemies the option of taking service under him or being thrown to the fishes. Having dealt with them according to their choice, he had disarmed the survivors, made them change dress with his own men, and distributed them among the three ships in such fashion that resistance was hopeless. Then, piloted by his prisoners, he had arrived at the island with the first grey of dawn. The garrison, deceived for the moment by this stratagem of disguise, had opened the gates of welcome, and the triumphant desperadoes had rushed the fortress and massacred the Saracen Dey and those who resisted them. Since that time Marco had ruled his conquest with an iron hand, adding three more captured vessels to his fleet and their crews to his stock of slave-labour, amassing treasure for himself and his officers, rewarding service lavishly, and crushing disaffection and failure alike with such terrible punishment that his name was becoming a terror among Mediterranean captains and his crews the most efficient band of pirates for many leagues.

Once established in his citadel, Marco never went himself to sea, and never sent his ships on a foray without keeping sufficient strength at home to guard his island fortress against any repetition of the trick by which he had seized it. Though he lived in such barbaric luxury as the island and his

forays afforded, Marco kept himself in fighting trim, and that by a method of his own devising. This consisted in voluntary combats with one or another of his sturdier prisoners, to whom, it was said, the Dey, with sardonic pleasantry, would offer a duel with himself for the wager of their freedom. But as the gigantic Marco wore chain armour, and the prisoner, though duly armed for the occasion, was denied that privilege, the results of these encounters had not thus far effected the release of any captive. Garth, on first learning of this fanciful diversion, had sent a defiant message to his captor; but either it had never been delivered by the overseer or Marco had been too unfavourably impressed by the report of his prisoner's desperate prowess when taken to avail himself of the proffered entertainment.

Of the Lady Isabel, too, Garth had learned a little since the morning of their encounter. It seemed that on the last successful expedition of the bandit's ships one of his captains, greatly daring, had seized a vessel conveying a noble Aragonese damsel with a rich dowry on her way to wed one of Don Jaime's knights at Palma. The Aragonese vessel, separated from her convoys by a gale, had fallen an easy prey. The lady's dowry had enriched the Dey's treasury, and Isabel had now for some few months been established as the unchallenged favourite of the Dey's slowly growing harem. The captain who had brought off this notable *coup* had been rewarded with the admiralty of the island fleet, which he had commanded till the recent unfortunate affair with the Genoese galley.

One morning, when the rest of the prisoners were driven off as usual to their tasks, Garth found himself left still shackled to the dungeon-wall. He had risen when the guard appeared, looking for the daily unlocking of his chain, but the man, with a curious glance, had passed him by. Too indifferent with misery to question, the Ryer seated himself again on the stale straw of the prison floor, watching his comrades in adversity file out into the daylight. Left solitary in the semi-darkness he gave himself—as so often before—to the fruitless exploration of his circumstances, searching for some plan which might offer the flimsiest hope

of escape. No prisoner that he had heard of had ever escaped the island save his comrade Diccon, but Garth's mind, like a caged beast behind its bars, worked ceaselessly to and fro on his problem.

Suddenly the door of the dungeon grated again, and a sandalled Moor entered. Peering into the gloom, he approached the Englishman, and unfastened the chain from his ankle-ring. "Come," he commanded.

"Whither?"

"To the Dey."

The prisoner stared at the unexpected answer. His blood quickened, and his scheming brain stirred into new activity, but with a show of indifference he followed, and found outside the tower three other bandits waiting to escort him.

They passed through the narrow, crooked alleys of the pirate hold to the inner side of the town-wall, which overhung the port. Presently they came to a point beneath a high watch-tower where the wall branched, enclosing on the very edge of the cliff a segment within which was built the Dey's rude citadel. Into this segment they penetrated through a narrow gateway sentinelled by armed men, and found themselves faced at a few yards' distance by the blank outer wall of the fortress itself, its surface broken only by a narrow window here and there, thickly barred with iron. Following the wall for a little distance they came to a second doorway, through which another sentinel admitted them into the building itself.

They were now in a kind of vestibule, the roof of which was held up by slight stone columns. It seemed to be used as a combined armoury and stable, for on one side several horses were stalled and on the other the walls were hung with numerous weapons, some of which an old man was busy cleaning. Beyond the stalls on the one side, and the weapons and armour on the other, doorways with horseshoe arches appeared to lead to other apartments. Straight in front of them the vestibule opened on a wide, irregular courtyard, pleasantly shaded with orange, lemon, and fig trees, and containing in its midst a large open cistern of clear water edged with stone flags.

Into this courtyard his guards led Aylwin, and, turning to the right, brought him to a sunny corner where an old well-shaft ran deeply down to the foundations of the hill. Near it a leisurely mule walked round and round in a circle at the end of a capstan pole.

With a curt "Remain here," the escort left him.

The circle round which the mule slowly travelled was partly sheltered from the sun by a timber roof. As the capstan turned it drew up from the well an endless chain of wooden buckets, which successively emptied themselves, before descending again, into a tunnel which fed the clear cistern. The courtyard was roughly triangular in shape. On two of its sides it was enclosed by the buildings of the citadel; the base of the triangle was formed by a high stone wall, which seemed to be carried midway across the cistern or pool upon two narrow arches, submerged all but their crowns, while below the surface of the water was visible the dim outline of iron gratings, still more effectually separating the two portions of the pool.

So bright was the sunlight, and so black by contrast the shadow under the timber roofing of the well-head under which the mule kept passing on its monotonous round, that it was some moments before the Ryer perceived a man's figure seated there. Narrowing his gaze, he made out a ragged individual, from whose ghastly sockets the eyes had gone, who sat chained to a ring in the wall and from time to time flicked listlessly at the leisurely mule with a long whip. For some minutes Aylwin watched him with dull repugnance.

Presently the man appeared to become conscious of this scrutiny, and looked up with his sightless face. "Who are you that watch me?" he demanded.

"A prisoner. Who are you?"

"Another prisoner, fool! Have they blinded you also, that you cannot use your eyes?"

"Why did they blind you?"

"They! Is anyone with you, prisoner?"

The man spoke in Arabic, the common tongue of Moors and Christians on the island, of which Garth had learned

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something in former voyaging and since his captivity had come to use easily.

"I am alone," he said. "Why did they blind you?"

"A woman blinded me."

"A woman!"

"These walls have ears, but Marco prefers me living. It was his Spanish woman."

"Isabel!"

The ragged muleteer half choked upon a mouthful of curses. Aylwin, with a shudder in the hot sun, bethought him of the white mare's rider, the disdainful black eyes in that face of tinted olive which had smiled while the wretched Achmed fought for his life.

"Have you seen her?" the blind man asked.

"It is not long since I saved her life."

"Fool! And have you come to be paid for your folly?"

"I know not why I am brought here. Tell me, how could a woman blind you?"

The man stuck out his sightless face towards the Ryer as though he would consider before replying. "I was an officer of the galley of Marco's which brought her to the island. I was caught in the net of her beauty, as Marco is now. When Marco took her to queen it in his fortress I would have killed him if I could. But he is strong and cunning, that Dey of La Roca! So I plotted to win a way to her again. Thrice I found my way to her, and the third time he found us together." The prisoner paused, listening, and mechanically flicked with his whip at the lagging mule.

"What then?"

"At first his jealousy raged like a whirlwind, till I thought he would have slain us both. But he, the master, was in chains to her, the captive. He could not do without her. And suddenly his fury seemed to freeze. 'Woman,' said he, with his devil's smile, 'you have deserved death.'

"'Then give me my deserts,' she mocked him, with scornful lips. For until that day she was fearless as she is pitiless.

"'So I would,' says Marco, 'but that I hope to teach you better, you wanton. I can master you.'

"'So can any pestilence that afflicts me,' says she."

"She had him there!" grinned Garth. "It seems she can use her tongue."

"When he heard that," went on the mule-driver, "his eyes flamed like a wild boar's. Then he laughed, baring his fangs. 'You fit my taste, spitfire,' says he. 'But I do not share my dainties. Consider now: which of us two'—and he laid his great hand on my shoulder with a grip like iron—'which of us two is the better man to please?'"

"She stood erect under his glance, her hands clenched at her sides. Slowly she turned from one to other of us, and then faced him, fatally defiant. 'You are both stout pirates, Marco,' says she. 'Yourself are the fiercer ruffian, but Tarik's are the gentler eyes.' God knows what made her say that—perhaps she thought to goad him to the mercy of swift murder.

"As for Marco, he only laughed again. 'That can be easily remedied,' says he. 'So choose: will you live with me or die with Tarik?'"

"She answered, 'If I had my way I would choose neither. But if Marco or the worms must have me, Marco might be the lesser evil.'

"The Dey bared his teeth again at that. 'I will teach you a greater devotion,' says he. 'And now for Tarik!' He turned to me. 'You have tasted Isabel's lips. Would you try their fruit again?' he jeered.

"'Kill me and have done,' I said. 'Well I know I have looked my last on her.'

"'Why, surely, Tarik,' the cruel monster grinned. 'You hear yourself how cordially she prefers me. Yet since I know how sweet are those red lips to you, it is they, not I, shall give you life or death. Answer, my princess. Shall Tarik die, and, dying, forget you, or shall he live, seeing you indeed no more, but cherishing in his heart the remembrance of your loveliness?'"

"'It pleases you to mock me,' said Isabel.

"Marco denied it softly. 'It pleases me to hear you sentence him. Shall he live or die, Isabel?'"

"I would have fought the dog, and died fighting," said Garth, with contemptuous pity.

"Fool! The Dey had his guards with him. Did I not say they disarmed me at the first?"

"Even so——" Aylwin began. "But no matter. What said Isabel?"

"'He shall live.'

"Marco sneered. 'Then tell him, Princess, with your own sweet lips, that he must live to remember you, but look on your face no more.'

"Isabel looked at him, doubting, and so did I. Then she turned to me, repeating his very words: 'Tarik, it seems you must live to remember me, but look on my face no more.'

"'Living or dying, I shall remember you,' I answered.

"'Oh, faithful one!' cried Marco, and, pushing me from him, laughed. Then he shouted, 'Ho, there!' and from outside the chamber, where they waited, a dozen of his ruffians entered. 'Seize this traitor who betrays my trust!' he cried. 'Hold him fast.'

"They threw themselves on me, and though I fought they gripped me so that I could not move. 'Bring hot irons,' ordered Marco, and the irons were brought.

"'Now, wanton, fulfil your sentence,' he commanded. 'Put out these eyes of Tarik's that looked on you too gently. So shall he live and remember you always, and you by his example shall learn fidelity.'

"When she drew back in horror from that dreadful deed the Dey mocked her. 'What! Would you promise the wretch life and then shrink from bestowing it! Then he must die indeed. But I spare you the sight of his death. Put out her eyes, men, before you strangle him. Then throw her after him from the walls.'

"They seized her white arms, and brought the hot irons near her beautiful face. At that she screamed, 'No, no! Marco, have mercy!'

"'It is you who have no mercy, girl,' says he. 'Approach them nearer, men, and hasten, lest they cool!'

"'No!' she screamed again, as the red glow came nearer. 'Marco, I will obey!'

"Then, at a sign from him, the butchers, who had hesi-

tated at her cry, loosed her hands and gave her the irons. She swayed a moment, then steadied and came toward me with white, set face, and her staring eyes were pitiless as hell. 'It is better to live blind than to die, Tarik,' said she, and without a flinch she lifted the dulling irons, and I shrieked as the light of day went out for me in agony. And afterwards Marco chained me here, that I might help, he said, to fill the cistern which supplies her bath. It is in the gardens, beyond the wall you see. And so you saved her life, poor fool, and won his thanks! Much I wonder what those thanks will be." He flicked the plodding mule again.

"Tarik," said Garth, "before I came hither I thought no man could be in more evil case than I. God pardon my ingratitude! Say, if one should kill this monster, would any stand behind him?"

The blind man listened again, and dropped his voice. "It has been tried, prisoner," he answered. "And the bones of those that tried lie bleaching in the sun. The foul fiend he serves protects him till he is ripe for the deepest pit in hell. Listen—they come for you again!"

Aylwin listened, but for some moments neither heard nor saw anything. Yet the blind man's hearing was not at fault, and presently he saw the escort returning. At a curt order he went with them.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ADMIRAL OF LA ROCA

THEY led him through a doorway in the wall not far from Tarik's corner, and traversing a large, well-shaded apartment where men of the garrison were gambling with dice, mounted a short flight of steps set in the thickness of a great stone wall which closed the end of the apartment, shutting out all beyond. The steps broadened as they rose, and on a narrow stone platform at the top, still within the thickness of the wall, a little group of armed rascals stood in semi-darkness before an iron-clamped oaken door.

The door opened to the escort and their prisoner, and clanged to behind them. They stood in a light, airy hall, floored with patterned mosaic, roofed with a low, painted dome. The walls of the hall, of smooth white stone, were freely adorned with coloured arabesques. The whole of one side was an open colonnade of slender pillars supporting traceried arches, and beyond the pillars lay a fragrant garden rich with the exuberant beauty and fruitfulness of the South.

In the warm light flooding from the garden the hall was a curious scene. On a low dais at its farther end a table was placed, covered with a banner of embroidered silk. Presiding at the table, in a throne-like chair, with his naked sword before him on the table, sat Marco the Dey, a huge, barbaric figure, his massive head covered with a tasselled scarlet cap, the glint of a ring-mail shirt showing beneath his cloak of white satin threaded with gold. At the Dey's right hand sat the Lady Isabel in a robe of shimmering green, and behind her, and almost as richly clothed, two women of the palace stood, a slim Moorish maid and a handsome negress.

Down each side of the chamber was ranged a double rank

of men, sea-hawks gathered from many lands, varying in arms and dress, in race and colour, united only by the bond of common interest in their hunt for plunder under the pitiless Marco. The captive recognized in this motley assembly the crews of the Dey's ships, recognized, too, at the end of the ranks near the table the captains and chief officers of the vessels.

As his escort led him down between the ranks toward the table Garth recognized another figure standing there like one brought for judgment—a stout, broad-shouldered ruffian of mixed blood and crafty features. He was Sandro, the corsair admiral, but there was little of the admiral about him now. A halter hung from his neck; his once rich clothing had been torn from him in strips from neck to belt, and hung about his legs like a tattered skirt; a broken sword was at his feet, and on his bullet head was fastened the coloured kerchief of a peasant girl.

Marco watched grimly, and the Lady Isabel with a faint disdainful smile, while the escort led their prisoner beside the admiral, and took place beside the pair. The Moorish girl and the negress tittered, but through the rest of the assembly was a silence of expectancy.

It was broken by the loud, harsh voice of the Dey. "Behold, all of you, the valiant English captain, Garth Aylwin!"

Garth, gaunt with toil, foul with captivity, his ragged clothing scarce hiding his big frame, felt the gaze of the assembly centre on him, and his slumbering pride awoke at the robber kinglet's sneer. Erect, he faced Marco, his blue eyes unfaltering in his burnt, unshaven face. The serving-women tittered again. Isabel, unsmiling now, watched the captive with a cool, appraising gaze.

"Captain," said Marco, "I fear you do not love me," and under Garth's sombre stare the chieftain's savage features relaxed in a mocking grin.

"Have I cause?" asked the Ryer.

"Why, as to that, man, we shall see. You have done me good service, and merited good reward. Now, here is one"—he pointed a finger at Sandro—"who failed me at

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need, losing my men, damaging my ships, while the Genoese slipped through his fingers. Once he brought me a peerless jewel"—the Dey laid a great hand on Isabel's shimmering robe—"and for that I spare him now the rowers' bench, but abase him before all my seamen. You, who preserved my treasure, giving her back from the very hands of robber Death, I am minded to recompense. Consider her now, and say, as a mariner who has seen many fair ones, should she not be as the salt of life to a poor exile?"

In the mingled lightness and extravagance of the Dey's words there was an undertone of mockery—of the woman, of his own infatuation, and of his captive. Garth, glancing at her, shrugged. "As a mariner, I have found that salt is bad for the eyes," he answered.

Marco started, then burst into a laugh. The lined-up corsairs exchanged glances.

"Good!" cried the Dey. "By my soul, excellent! Hear, all of you: salt is bad for a mariner's eyes. A rich jest, Isabel!"

"A rich insolence," answered Isabel. The voice was velvet smooth, though shaken with anger, and the disdainful glance was no longer cold, but flashing dangerously. "But salt has other uses, Lord Marco."

"As what, my pearl of women?"

"To rub on the back of a beaten slave."

"Oh, ungrateful one!" gibed the Dey. "The valiant captain hath but wiled away an idle minute in talk with Tarik, whom we did once check for his presumption, and, behold, in that little time he hath learned a profitable lesson, and recited it to us right wittily. My soul, I vow, goes out to the man. Besides, we are acquainted of old, though I knew it not until I learned his name. Aha! You start at that, Captain. Yet it is so. How, therefore, shall I pay your service?"

The heart of the prisoner leaped suddenly with wild hope. He was mystified, yet that Marco was of his own land he already knew. He answered bluntly, "With my freedom and my ship."

Marco rubbed his great hands upon each other with a

grim enjoyment, and glanced along the watchful lines of his men. "Not so fast," said he. "Let us first hear what a captain of the Navy of the English Ports is doing in these seas."

Said Garth, "I was on my way to Rome," and his voice was hard and bitter with the memory of his disaster.

"Ah! A pilgrim! I knew not you Ryers were so pious."

How should this renegade bandit know he was from Rye? Garth broke impetuously into his own tongue.

"In God's name, Marco, who and what art thou? I bore letters to his Holiness at Rome. I was well and worthily recommended by great ones in our land. I sought freedom from an unjust marriage. Treasure I bore too to help my cause, which you have taken from me."

The burly Dey raised his hands in sham horror, and translated, "Hearken, all of you, to a true romance. This brave captain bore a petition to the Pope at Rome to free him from his wife. But why, Captain? Is she not fair enough? Tell us in words that all may understand, for surely here is no common tale!"

Too deceived by his sudden hope to appreciate well the raillery in the other's tone, Garth went on: "I was wed to her as I lay in fever and unconscious of my words. It was a foul trick, but the chain was binding."

The passion of his appeal had gripped attention, and all eyes were on him now.

"But your wife, man!" said Marco. "Was she hideous, or poor, or witless?"

"She has beauty, and lands, and wit."

"Then why reject her, fool?"

"Because I was vowed to another, who is more to me than life!" cried the captive, with desperate ardour.

The Dey heaved a great sigh, and raised his massive hands. "Oh, faithful one!" he exclaimed. "Here is constancy! Here is devotion that should prick all hearts! By Allah and his prophet, by the Holy Virgin and all the holy saints, it shall not be without reward! Isabel, jewel of my soul, you who know so well the worth of true fidelity, how should such virtue be repaid?"

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"A troubadour's fee for a troubadour's tale," answered Isabel coldly.

"Troubadour!" Marco roared. "I tell you, and all here, this man is a captain in the King of England's navy, a cunning seaman and a renowned fighter. More"—here the Dey leaned back and laughed loud—"I myself bear witness that he speaks the truth." Then, recovering himself from his outburst, his barbaric figure stood to its height, and his grim glance roved down the ranks of his men, over the swarthy faces incredulous yet fascinated, till it came to rest on his ragged, half-naked captive. He stretched out his right arm in the manner of an ecclesiastic. "Captain," he proclaimed, "here is your freedom: I, Marco Dey of La Roca, absolve you from your marriage!"

Still half hoping for he knew not what, though half convinced by now that he was being mocked, Garth stilled himself with an effort. "What is your purpose with me?" he demanded. "If I have served you, give me leave to go my ways to Rome."

"What? Penniless, Captain? Consider! The wheels of Holy Church need greasing before they will revolve. And the way to Rome is long and perilous. Whereas I, Marco, absolve you here and now."

"None can unbind save those who bind," answered Garth, his voice trembling a little under the curb he held on his rising rage. "It pleases you to mock me. A brave sport! Mock, then, since I am in your power."

Marco leaned forward, looking fixedly at his prisoner. "Consider well, Captain: do you not know me?"

"I never saw you till I fell into your hands."

"Oh, forgetful one! Listen, all of you, for here is such a tale as I vow you never heard from minstrel in hall or storyteller in market-place. I, the Dey, and no other, bound this poor man in his chains of wedlock. And now I unbind him. Do you not remember, Captain, the hermitage at Playden?"

Aylwin stared, gave a great gasp, and started forward, but the guards restrained him roughly. The eager shipmen broke their ranks, till their officers, perceiving the Dey

sprawl contentedly across the table, ordered them harshly back.

"Ha! I see your memory revives. Gentle comrades, I was a hermit, Marcus." The burly rogue crossed his great arms over his mail-clad chest and rolled up his eyes with an expression of mock piety which sent a shout of laughter through the hall. "I dwelt in an anchorite's cell, and for my holy reputation men fed me with their charity. It chanced this noble Captain was brought wounded to my cell by one who charged me to keep him for a cruel death. But ere that cruel one came again there came a fair lady—as fair, I vow, as even you, Isabel, my pearl—who, when she looked on the sick man, fell so deep in love that she paid me a rich fee to wed her to him straightway, since he, in his fever, mistook her for another. A merry jest! And with that noble marriage fee I set forth to seek a better fortune than the hermit's bowl. And how we seized this pleasant isle there are some of you that know. So here sits Marco, my little ones, who, having learned abstinence, can enjoy plenty, and having rusted too long in a monastery cell, now flies his banner from a castle tower. And let him overthrow me who can!" With a braggart gesture the Dey snatched up the sword from the table and brandished it over his head.

The pirates shouted laughing approval, while Garth, bewildered by the din, dazed by the suddenness of this revelation, clung to the one clear fact: the hermit who had bound him to the Lady Adela and the corsair who had made him a galley-slave were one and the same. That unknown, cursed by him so often, who had laid the Church's chains upon his spirit had now riveted his own fetters on his body, and lolled before him exulting in his deed. Helpless prisoner as he was, so black a fury raged in Garth's veins as for the moment rendered him dull and blind.

When presently he grew conscious of the tightened grip of his guards upon his rigid arms Marco's harsh laughter seemed still to ring in his ears. What happened? Had he attempted to rush forward to vengeance and to death? He gazed round with slowly clearing wits. The faces he

encountered expressed many emotions—some mockery, some sympathy, some merely rough amusement.

Suddenly he intercepted so strange a look from the eyes of the Lady Isabel that it steadied him like a cold douche. It was the look of one who, unaffected, yet not quite aloof, studied the suffering of a victim with the interest of some ulterior purpose. Aylwin could not read it, but it arrested him, restoring him somehow the mastery of himself. He faced the Dey again.

"Be what you may to-day, Marco," said he, "through you the Church bound me. Only the Church can unbind."

Marco laughed again, clattering his sword back on the table. "Valiant Captain, you do not yet know how exquisite is this jest. Man, the Church never bound you! You are no more wed to the Lady Adela than I!"

"Liar and renegade!" cried Garth. "The witnesses to the marriage have sworn to it in my presence."

The Dey's laughter ceased abruptly, and anger flamed in his eyes. "Silence, fool, or I have you flayed alive. Shall the Dey of La Roca lie to his galley-slave? I say you are not married. Didst ever hear of the Abbey of Robertsbridge?"

"What Sussex man has not?"

"I was of the Abbey," said Marco. "But I came first from the South, and I was never made for chanting litanies. There came another brother to the Abbey who had followed the Crusades. I talked with him, and learned how a man with brains and sinews might live like a baron in his castle in these lands of the sun. I learned from him the Saracen speech, and I dreamed of the life of freedom, and blue skies, and warm seas, and fair women, and fighting men whom I would rule. And one day I rifled the Abbey treasure, and fled with what I could carry. They hunted me with dogs—a mighty hunt for three days, Captain. But in the Kent marshes I gave them the slip, though I could not save the treasure, and so, recovering that, they went back to their cells, and afterwards there was great to-do in the chapel, I heard, and poor Brother Hildebrand—I was Hildebrand, my little ones—was excommunicated with bell, book, and candle.

But the good hermit Marcus hid himself in Playden Woods and awaited what Fortune might bring. And Fortune brought you, and then the Lady Adela and her jewels. So now Captain Garth Aylwin no longer serves the Navy of the Ports of King Henry, but that of the Dey of La Roca. Is not that a pretty tale, good comrades?"

Once more Garth returned to his own tongue. "If you have been English, will you batten on the miseries of your own countrymen? What ill have I or mine wrought you?"

"None, indeed," answered Marco, speaking English in his turn, "save that you killed too many of my rascals when they surprised you, Captain. As for battenning on your troubles, which is a question you asked me once before, I bear you no ill will. Be reasonable, man! A pirate, look you, lives not by piety, nor by pity, but by piracy. Your pirate, like your greater kings, needs gold and women, food and wine and ships, and men to get them for him. What matter whether they come from England or France, Spain or Africa? You have called me liar and renegade. A smaller tyrant would have slit your throat. Bah! What are creeds? Refuge for women and weaklings! One power rules men, and his name is Fate."

The ragged sailor drew himself up. "A man's soul is greater than Fate, Marco."

The bandit waved the argument away. "O valiant folly! A man's soul, if he have one, is a part of his fate, and how can the part be greater than the whole? I tell thee, Fate is supreme, and therefore, when Fate points a finger, the wise man marks the portent. And for this reason do men pay respect in their hearts, though they may deny it with their lips, to wizards and witches and such as tell fortunes by spells and magic." The fierce countenance of the renegade had become of a sudden curiously eager.

"Am I brought from my dungeon to argue of wizardry?" asked Garth bitterly.

"By no means, noble Captain." The tassel of the Dey's scarlet cap shook grotesquely with the shaking of his head.

"But to fulfil what Fate hath mapped for you and me."

"It pleases you to talk in riddles, Marco."

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"Consider!" Planting his elbows on the embroidered banner that covered the table, and propping his great head on his hands, the brigand fixed his captive with a curious gaze. "Until the day you saved this pretty wanton from death, and thereby preserved for me the pleasant torments of love—for I confess she has bewitched me—until that day, I say, when you told your name, I knew not whose ship it was my fellows had seized. But when I knew I saw the pointing of Fate's finger. 'Here is the man,' said Mistress Fate in my ear, 'who came to thee out of the darkness, doomed to die. Here is the man whose presence in thy cell first opened the door of escape from poverty, and set thy feet on the road to freedom and the rich life thou didst desire. Here is he who did not die, though Death seemed doubly to have claimed him. This man cometh to thee again, incredibly, bringing wealth over perilous seas, preserving to thee thy choicest treasure at the very moment thou wast about to lose her. This man I have linked to thy destiny,' said Mistress Fate. Shall we shut our ears to such a message, Captain?"

The villain's sincerity defied doubt. At this revelation of his superstition hope revived in Garth.

"What then, Marco?"

"Why, this, I think." The Dey spoke slowly, hesitation seeming to yield to resolve as his words came. "To chain you again to the oar would be to flout good Mistress Fate. Moreover, always have I rewarded such as served me, and punished such as failed in their service. If I free you equally do I break with my destiny. I know you a good seaman: none but such could have brought his ship hither. I know you a good fighter: only a grim fighter, taken so at disadvantage, could have done my fellows such hurt. Therefore mark what I will do. This Sandro, who led my ships against the Genoese, has been degraded. I make you admiral in his place."

His frowning brows still thoughtfully considering his prisoner, the Dey paused. At a mutter from him in Arabic the guards released their hold of the sailor, but stood watching him closely.

As for Captain Aylwin, so great was his surprise, so amazing the prospective revolution in his fortunes, that for the moment he stood speechless. He looked this way and that, at the fierce pirate crews standing in puzzled expectation at the uncomprehended dialogue, at Isabel still regarding him with that curious gaze, and back at the great figure of the Dey.

"And what if I refuse the service, Marco?" he asked in a low voice.

The Dey's frown deepened. His eyes flashed perilously. Then he gave a grim smile. "You will not refuse the service, Captain. Mistress Fate does not work by halves. I have freed you from the Lady Adela. There remains the other she, of whom you raved in my hermitage. Was she not called Rosamund?"

The sailor stiffened. "What of her?"

"Only this. I pay well for service. When you have led my ships to victory, and brought me many captives and much treasure, and Marco Dey of La Roca is supreme in all this sea, and feared from Spain to Italy, then I will give you your freedom, and you shall take your ship and go to Rosamund, or to the Pope, or to the devil, as you may please. Come, now, will you refuse my service?"

"Who guarantees the payment?" Aylwin demanded harshly.

"Who but that same Mistress Fate that sent you hither? None but a fool plays fast and loose with Fate. It is written that the devout and faithful Jacob toiled seven years for the Lady Rachel. Will you balk at seizing me seven ships for the Lady Rosamund?"

Erect and rigid, his thoughtful stare seeming held by the glitter of the naked sword before him, Garth stood for a while silent. But he saw at that moment neither sword nor silken banner, nor corsair crews, nor anything around him; only the grey walls of Rye, and a grey eyed, black-haired girl who watched for him over the sea. The Dey's offer did not shock him as it might a modern. The sea and fighting were his trade, and piracy in those days was more an adventure than a crime. Even the risk that in the Dey's service he

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might have to turn his hand against his countrymen did not greatly trouble him, whose own townsmen waged perennial feud against the ships of East Anglia, and who had himself so recently seen English armies ranged against each other on the Sussex Downs. But his ship was his religion, and the shipmates whom he had brought to this grievous plight cried out silently for remembrance. Remembrance even against the promise of Rosamund. At last he raised his blue eyes to Marco's.

"I will be your admiral—on a condition."

"How—a condition!" The Dey glowered round on his motley followers, becoming restless under all this foreign talk. "Does a chained dog make conditions with his master for the loosening of his chain?"

"This dog does, Marco."

"What conditions, thou stiff-necked Ryer?"

"If I command as admiral I will command my own ship, and my own men shall serve me."

The Dey leaned back, laughing. "So that in the battle the dogs may turn and bite us? A pretty scheme, Captain!"

"I said not they should be armed," answered Aylwin. "That were indeed a fool's proposal. But strike off their chains, and leave them to man the oars as volunteers under my command. I will wager to get more out of them than your lash-men. With freedom before their eyes each man will row like three. But I will not command a fleet in which my shipmates sweat blood under the lash. Neither for hope of liberty nor fear of death."

"Nor for love of Rosamund?" sneered the Dey.

"Neither for hell nor heaven, thou damned renegade!" cried Garth, pricked with rage. "She who waits for me waits for a man, not for a frightened slave."

"Are you sure she waits?" asked the Dey.

"As sure as that this iron collar galls my neck."

"Then we will remove your certitude," laughed Marco. He spoke to the guards, and the badge of servitude was taken off the prisoner. The assembly watched in surprise

Said Marco, "It is long, Captain, since any so dared me, and I find it refreshing. Therefore, and since Fate speaks

for you, you shall have your ship, and for a time your men shall go unfettered and unarmed. Yourself alone shall have what arms you will, and lead my crews in fight. But with such a force of mine aboard, mark you, as at the first sign of your Ryers' failing faith shall hack off the right hand of every man. And for your own fidelity you shall be closely watched enough! Serve me well, and win freedom. Seek to trick me, and you shall curse the mother who bore you! Do you take service?"

"When I know its term, Marco, I will consider."

"Its term shall be when seven good ships shall have been added to my navy and their crews to my service. And if by then our Southern sun shall have bleached the memory of that Rosamund you rave of, why, you shall join our free companions of La Roca if you will, and save yourselves the peril of a weary voyage. Do you agree?"

Captain Aylwin stood thinking, then said with sombre defiance, "Till seven ships are taken, or hell forgets to help you, I agree."

Marco grinned. "And I accept your loving service. Said I not that Fate is supreme, Captain?" He broke off the colloquy, clapped his great hands to call his men's attention, and rose to his feet, towering over all. "Hearken, all of you!" he cried. "This Sandro, who led you to disaster, leads you no more. This Englishman, who fought you like a trapped lion, shall now fight for you like a lion freed. From to-day he is admiral of my ships. Take him honourably to the admiral's quarters, and let him lack nothing. And if any refuse him obedience, that man I will have buried alive. I, the Dey, have spoken."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT

MONTH succeeded month in the craggy pirate isle. Too strongly placed and too carefully guarded for a small force to attack, too unimportant as yet to challenge invasion in force, the outlaw hold on La Roca flourished and multiplied.

On an evening of late spring the Admiral of La Roca sat in his quarters in the fortress and gazed thoughtfully out at blue sky and blue sea. His chamber was a large square apartment near the top of a tower which rose from the walls at an angle where the cliff dropped steeply below to the haven. Above the chamber, and reached by a stairway outside his door, was the sentinel's outlook, commanding the sea far and wide. A hail from the look-out could summon the chief of the Dey's fleet at any moment should a sail be sighted which promised profit or threatened danger.

The Admiral's room offered a curious mixture of luxury and severe utility. Silk and damask tapestries hid the bare stone walls. The floor was strewn with fresh rushes, and a great carved table in the midst was laden with food and drink in choice vessels of silver and glass for the meal which the Admiral would shortly share with certain of his officers. Cushioned divans were set beside the table, and from below rose the appetizing smell of cooking.

Elsewhere in the room were arms and armour. On the panels of the oaken door were pinned a large chart of the surrounding seas and a detailed plan of the island and town. On the bed in one corner, just as he had flung them down, lay the Admiral's belt and sword.

The sun was nearing the horizon, and the reddening rays shone through the open arch of the unglazed window, and

glowed on the Admiral's suit of crimson silk. It was a very different Garth Aylwin who sat frowning toward the sunset from the wretched prisoner who not so long ago had been led before the Dey. In the short spell of his authority the gang of mixed adventurers over whom he had been so suddenly set had learned that the new commander was one who understood the art of leadership. A man who would be obeyed to the letter and the instant, who laid his plans with cold craft, but, once the fray was joined, became an incarnate fury before whose onset resistance wilted away.

Of the seven ships which the Englishman had bargained to seize for his ambitious master three lay already anchored in the haven. The manner of their seizure had set the Admiral on a pinnacle in the eyes of the lawless collection of ruffians who constituted his command. Selecting from his officers a half-breed Spaniard of unusual daring and resource, he had set him a-land by night on the coasts of Mallorca, charged with discovering the number and disposition of the ships in Palma Bay. A few nights later he had picked up the man at a point agreed, and, his report being favourable, Aylwin sailed his whole fleet into the bay after nightfall on the eve of Easter. Leaving the ships to await him, he transferred their fighting crews into the boats, and led them through the darkness with muffled oars, under guidance of the half-breed, till they came alongside a great anchored galley of King Jaime that lay close to the mole before the new cathedral. As Aylwin had surmised, the galley's crew were ashore for the celebrations of the morrow, and at the swift and sudden assault of the pirates the scanty watch yielded with scarcely a blow. Ere the alarm could be given the galley's moorings had been slipped, and, driven by two score desperate rascals at the oars, she was racing for the rendezvous. Behind her, trumpets called to arms, and signal fires leaped along the hills, but there was no pursuit, for no man knew the numbers of the enemy or their direction in the darkness. The Dey's fleet reached their island fortress without loss of man or boat.

A few of the galley's crew, however, had escaped by leap-

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ing overboard while yet their ship lay near the mole, and Garth, rightly judging that from their description the identity of the raiders would be known, set instantly to work to meet King Jaime's counter-blow, for it was not to be expected that the Mallorquins would suffer such an indignity unavenged. He kept his swiftest vessel patrolling day and night off the haven, while ashore he pushed forward with feverish haste his own plan for receiving the invaders. From point to point across the narrow, precipitous mouth of the haven two stout iron chains were run, parallel to each other, a few ships' lengths apart, and capable of being raised or lowered from the shore near the mole by stout winches. A third chain swung between the two, running along them by means of iron rings, the ring on each of the main chains being connected with the mole by a rope cable. Either of the main chains provided by itself an effective boom for the protection of the haven, but the Admiral aimed at more than this, and himself explained the working of the whole device to Marco's men, drilling them in it daily till he had them clockwork perfect in their task.

Scarcely was this done when, on a breezy morning, with the mistral driving the white horses over the blue sea-plain, his look-out vessel came flying for the port, pursued by six great war-galleys flying King Jaime's flag. The island ship raced into the safety of the haven. A mile astern of her, streaming in line ahead at the full speed of their banked oars, the pursuers swept down, the banner of Aragon flaunting proudly at their mastheads, their decks crowded with fighting men. The corsair's fleet, lying on their oars in the haven, awaited their Admiral's signal, while the rest of the outlaws manned the walls at the cliff-top in a grim silence, for if those six galleys landed their crews the Dey Marco would need all the favour Fate had left for him.

Round swung the scouting ship beside her waiting sisters, and at the same time a flag fluttered to the masthead of the *Royal Richard*. Round flew the winches on the mole, urged by a score of shouting bandits, and the inner chain rose slowly till it broke the surface of the water at either end. Close inshore now, the unsuspecting invaders swept on

their pursuit. The leading galley, parting the sapphire waves in foam at her bows, rushed between the bluffs.

Suddenly she was upon the chain. For a moment she drove it outward before her, lifting the ends clear of the water: then, brought up short in full career, she heeled violently. Her short mast, with its bellying square sail set before a following wind, snapped like a dry twig. Hard on the noise of the breaking mast came the crash of rending oars, and a wild shouting as the armed men were flung in a heap across the galley's heaving deck.

Ere she righted Garth dropped his signal flag. The second enemy ship was now close behind her leader, putting her helm up and backing madly with her sweeps to avoid collision. Up went the outer chain, to the shouts of the exulting winchmen. The second galley, driving helpless against the first, drew off again, only to find herself imprisoned between those parallel lines of iron, while the third of King Jaime's ships altered helm only just in time to avoid running on the outer boom.

Again the *Royal Richard* signalled to the shore, and the winchmen, throwing themselves on the ends of the cables attached to the cross-chain, began slowly to drag the two entangled galleys by main force toward the mole, while the four remaining Aragonese ships, hastily lowering sail, drew offshore under oars, fearing to approach their comrades lest they too should become involved in this unsuspected trap.

The situation of the trapped ships became every moment more desperate. With their crews and rowers in confusion, scarcely yet realizing what had happened to them, they were being irresistibly dragged like netted fish toward the cliff, while from the garrisoned rock above them, and from the pirate fleet in the free waters of the haven, their decks were being searched by a pitiless rain of missiles. It was hopeless to prolong the struggle. Before the two hooked ships had been drawn to the mole the Mallorquins dragged down their flag in surrender. Thereupon Garth ordered their fighting crews to come ashore singly, without their arms, and the crestfallen survivors were lined up on the

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mole. The Admiral himself boarded the captured galleys, where the rowers, who by his express directions had been as far as possible spared in the fusillade, were still chained to their benches.

He tersely bade them choose: "Will you be free men and fight under my banner, or stay in slavery?" The wretches welcomed their deliverance with a shout. Thereon, without more ado, and while the four companion ships still manœuvred in the offing, he ordered their fetters to be taken off them, and the arms of their late masters to be put in the hands of such as could use them. Then the captives were led back to the ships and chained in their turn to the oars.

It chanced that the admiral of the invading fleet was among the prisoners, having been aboard the first galley. Him, and the captains of the two vessels, Garth had brought before himself and Marco on the *Royal Richard*.

"Sirs," said Garth, "will you carry a message to your master, and swear to deliver it faithfully?"

The prisoner admiral said he would.

"Tell King Jaime," said Garth, "that I freely admit he has a claim against me for his ship which I seized. But since a brave commander is of more value than the best ship, I now level the balance between us by restoring you to him in freedom, and I weigh the measure down by sending with you your two valiant captains. Your two lost ships I hold as just spoils of war. Say further to your master that we of La Roca design him no hurt, and from this day will live at peace with him if he will, but that if he will not we can defend ourselves with the strong hand, as you have seen. And in proof of our goodwill to King Jaime, if there be among our prisoners taken to-day any whom he would especially wish restored, we will restore such men upon due ransom paid. Marco, have I spoken well?"

"Excellently well," said Marco. "Give the gentlemen a boat and let them begone."

With this impudent message the three officers were given a small row-boat, and pulled themselves back to their diminished fleet, while Garth gave orders to lower the outer boom again in readiness for any renewed attempt. But

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the Mallorquins had found La Roca too tough a nut to crack, and within a few minutes of taking their discomfited commander on board they were making all speed away from the island.

All this had taken place less than a week back. The corsairs were beside themselves with jubilation at the achievement, and the name of Aylwin was a spell to conjure with. Men sprang to do his bidding. The gold chain which he wore about his neck Marco himself had placed there, vowing that the deed would make his name as Dey ring through the Mediterranean.

Garth had not rested idle since the Mallorquin attack. The new ships had been repaired where necessary, the crews had been freshly apportioned, the identity of the rescued galley-slaves had been inquired into by him for his own purposes, and here and there, when free for a moment from the observation of Marco's spies, he had dropped words of encouragement to his own Englishmen on the *Royal Richard* and to the freed captives from the Mallorquin galleys. One day not too distant he planned to test the strength of their gratitude.

Sitting to-night by the stone arch of his window, the Admiral of La Roca reviewed the past few days with inward exultation, and though his weather-tanned face had a stern and frowning aspect, his thought winged far. Since Marco had baited him with the promise of liberty, fickle Fortune had shown her smiles. The wine of success had warmed but not intoxicated him; the reckless courage which had given him the freedom of Rye was buttressed now with a quality of calculating craft which made it doubly dangerous. He believed he had sown the seed of deliverance for himself and his shipmates, but well he knew it was a tender plant that a wind of suspicion might nip in the bud. He had taken Marco's measure, and well he knew that for all his tyrant's fair words La Roca could not long contain them both. Marco, cunning and bestial savage as he was, lurked in his lair while Garth fed him with ships and men, and prepared to meet craft with craft by manning the ships with those whom himself had freed, and filling the rowers'

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benches with men hot with hate for the Dey who had enslaved them, men who at the given word would strain every muscle to win back their freedom. But the seed of deliverance must ripen ere it flowered into revolt. Too much haste might well be fatal to himself and his Ryers who trusted him.

Haste might be fatal! This was the thought that deepened the Admiral's frown as he brooded at the window. For something had occurred that very afternoon which hinted that some inkling of his plans might have escaped the secrecy of his own brain. He had been with the Dey and his officers at an inspection of the reconditioned ships. The townsfolk too had been invited to visit the vessels as they lay in the mole: their crews of slave-rowers chained in their stations, their fighting men ranged on the decks, Marco's banner at their mastheads. Flattering crowds—such crowds as La Roca held—had pressed about the Dey and his victorious Admiral. And suddenly Garth had felt a small object thrust into his hand. There was something furtive about the pressure, and he had closed his hand instinctively, catching as he did so a momentary glimpse of a barelegged urchin, who, as he disappeared among the people, had certainly winked and put the fingers of both brown paws upon his lips.

Not till he reached the privacy of his apartment had the Admiral ventured to examine what he held. He took it out again now from a fold of his crimson tunic and frowned at it: a ball of fine black silk thread. He turned it about in his fingers. It suggested nothing. Yet that it meant something he was certain.

Presently it struck him that the ball might contain its solution within itself. He pressed it hard between finger and thumb. Though closely wound, it yielded slightly to the pressure, and he thought he felt a hardness at the heart of it. He found the end of the thread, and began winding it on the fingers of his left hand. When he had done he found what had been the inner end of the thread fastened to several links of a gold chain, round which, and round a tiny piece of folded parchment, the silk had been wound.

The parchment showed a roughly executed but easily recognized sketch of his tower, from a window of which was depicted a cord hanging to the base of the rock. Underneath were written two English words: "To-night. Mid-night."

Garth stood up, the blood pounding in his veins. What stratagem was this? From friend or enemy? And what could it mean from either? He leaned from his window looking down the sheer drop to the rock-slope, from the edge of which the cliff dropped again, sheer and unscalable, to the waters of the haven. To his left ran unbroken the wall of the outer garden of the Dey's palace, with but a few feet of rock between it and the cliff-edge. To his right ran the sun-bleached machicolations of the town wall, rising from the cliff-edge itself.

Unenlightened, the Admiral withdrew his head, and was still pondering that intriguing message when his servant entered to announce his guests. Thrusting thread, gold, and parchment into his tunic, he went to greet them.

Throughout the meal the talk ran on ships and raids, the achievements of the past, the promise of the future, but ever at the back of Aylwin's mind as he talked was the problem of that bit of parchment. He plied his guests generously with wine, striving to give the impression of drinking heavily himself, while keeping his brain clear and his eyes observant for the slightest hint. That the words of the message were in his own tongue added to his mystification. Who was there in that isle of Southern brigands capable of sending such a message, and conveying it, unnoticed, to his hand? The more he thought, the further he was from a solution, and the evening yielded no enlightenment. There was not a man among his guests whose interests were not bound up with the piratical enterprises of their chief; not a man he would have dreamed of trusting with the least inkling of his own designs. They stayed with him till the night was well advanced. When they left, in a state of cheerful intoxication, Garth called his servant, and, throwing himself all dressed on his couch as though too full of liquor to be at

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the trouble of undressing, ordered the man in a voice of simulated thickness to set the room in order and get to his bed.

It lacked still a half-hour to midnight, and as he lay with closed eyes, breathing heavily, yet throwing from time to time a searching glance at the unsuspecting Moor, Garth worked his wits in vain for a solution of his problem.

At last the man departed. As the door closed behind him the Admiral rose from his bed, and, crossing the room with silent, sandalled feet, cautiously secured the door with the bolt. Then, turning his lamp low and setting it in shadow, he crossed to the window and looked out.

It was a moonless night, very dark, though the stars were brilliant overhead. Listening hard, he could make out no sounds but the occasional shuffling step of the sentinel on the tower above him and the faint sigh of the waves along the rocky shore outside the haven. The rocks beneath him lay in a blackness wherein nothing was discernible. Above him the dark wall of the tower ran up to the projection of the machicolated parapet. His mysterious correspondent had chosen the hour well. At midnight the guard would be changed, and for several minutes the vigilance of the sentinel would certainly be relaxed. Presently he heard the relief ascending the stone stairway within the tower. After another upward glance to assure himself that the sentinel was not in view, he carefully lowered the gold links down the wall, till the slacking of the silken thread told him they had touched ground. Then, the end in his hand, he waited.

Presently he felt a slight jerk of the thread, followed by another. Taking this as a signal to wind in the thread, he did so, till he held in his hand the end of a thin cord. Continuing to draw this up, and disposing it in a neat coil at his feet, he finally drew up the end of a light rope, to which was attached a piece of parchment. Making fast the rope, Aylwin carried the parchment to his lamp. Again English words met his eye: "Pull. Heavy."

He returned to the window and began to draw in the rope. Whatever was at the end was certainly heavy, and the labour of raising it was considerable. The Admiral was strong, but

the sweat stood out on his forehead. To ease the strain, and spare friction on the rope, he hitched it for a moment, and, fetching a leathern jacket which hung near his bed, fixed it so as to take the rub of the rope as it crossed his window ledge. This done, the load came up more readily, till a knot crossed the jacket with a slight jar, and the rope became double. Pausing an instant to listen, he was startled by a faint whisper from the blackness below the window. He made the rope fast and leaned out, to discern dimly a human form suspended against the wall and a hand that stretched up toward him. In silence he seized the hand—it was cold—and, steadying himself against the window, drew up the daring climber. They stood side by side in the half dark, the newcomer breathing in quick gasps.

“In God’s name, who are you?” Aylwin demanded.

For answer the hand was laid across his mouth, and he felt himself drawn away from the window. “Sit,” came the command in low-whispered Arabic, and he sat on the edge of his bed, while the other took a backward step.

The light of the dimmed lamp fell on the face of the midnight acrobat, and Garth stared like a man in a dream. It was Isabel, a tide of black hair loose over her face, her slim body dressed in grey from head to foot: a close-fitting grey tunic, a man’s short grey breeches and stockings, and even sandals of the same drab colour.

CHAPTER XXIV

TALK WITH A TIGRESS

SHE seated herself coolly on the bed beside him, her breath coming now more easily, and proceeded to coil up the loose masses of her hair, watching him the while with a faint intriguing smile.

"A face shows white against the dark," she explained in a low tone. "It is well you are strong, Admiral."

Aylwin, his first amazement over, got to his feet, and, passing a hand across his brow, still damp from his exertion, stood glowering down at her.

"Strong enough to strangle you, and fling you clear to the water, my lady!" he answered grimly. "I am a man who is careful of his eyesight."

"Fool!" said she. "I have but to scream and there would be an end of your admiralty. Perhaps of your eyes also. But I think my brains may serve you better in my head, and your eyes serve me better in yours. How think you, Englishman?"

"I know not," answered Garth. "But this I know: if you have set a trap for me, there are two will never leave this tower alive." He picked up the sword from where it lay on the bed beside her, and drew the naked steel from the scabbard.

Isabel smiled disdainfully. "Madman! Once you saved my life. Why should I pay that with treachery? And if I would destroy you, is there no easier path for Marco's pampered mistress than by way of your tower-wall, trusting her neck to the strength of your arm?"

"Where is the Dey?"

"Sound enough asleep, Admiral. Trust me for that. Till two hours after dawn."

"Why are you here, madame?"

She laughed now. "Because Marco's admiral has a strong arm. Englishman, I have watched you. You make plans. Do not trouble to deny it. But you are wise. You trust no man. You will use others, but will not confide in them. In La Roca that is wise. But though you are wise I proved your plottings with my message. Was my English good? I learned the words from Marco himself." She smiled again, derisively.

"Good enough for the purpose, it seems," said Garth.

Isabel nodded, her black eyes shining in the lamp glow. "I meant you should think that some one could give you help or warning. If I have read you rightly you would need to know the meaning of my message. If you had not needed to know, think you I would have risked what I have risked to-night?"

"And now?" He still fingered the steel blade.

"And now we will talk as two who understand each other."

"You say you understand me, lady, but, by the Mass, I do not understand you! Why have you dared this adventure?"

"Think you it might be for love?" She leaned toward him, half mockingly at first, her upturned eyes searching his face. She became suddenly a melting siren, the haughtiness, the cruelty of her beauty lost in the witchery of her glance. Aylwin, considering her, fought back the responsive leap of lusty blood before he spoke again, curtly cold:

"Madame, I lack so much presumption."

She discarded on the instant her mask of seduction, and stood erect before him. "Señor, it was for hate!" The low voice thrilled. She was not acting now. From the smouldering black eyes flashed a momentary flame; the hand with which she gripped his sword-arm shook with her passion. He had not thought that she, the indolently scornful, could be so moved. "Hate of Marco"—she seemed almost to

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choke on the name. "My master and yours, Admiral—the bestial, upstart slave who rules this herd of scum! He must be destroyed. You and I, Englishman, must trample him under foot, crush him into the earth he defiles!"

Astonished as he was by such an outburst, and no longer doubting her sincerity, Garth had yet learned too hard a lesson to share his counsels readily. If he had plans, he would guide them himself. "And how, madame, shall this be brought to pass?" he stolidly demanded.

"First, arm your Englishmen. I have heard that, though taken unawares, they fought like fiends before they were overcome."

"How can I arm them, whose every day is spied upon?"

"I will arm them, Admiral."

"You!" Aylwin started. Here was something practical which he could not afford to ignore.

Isabel smiled, and her smile was almost tigerish. "You had not thought of such an alliance! The harvest you are seeding can be reaped by brains and valour, but not alone by either. It shall be mine to arm them; it must be yours to make them fight."

"By God, they need no making, madame! But how shall this be done?"

"How was my message delivered to you to-day? There are many whose service I can command, and not all of them are children, Admiral! Believe me or not, if you were minded to be Dey of La Roca I could make you so within a week."

Her black eyes glowed upon him, her bosom rose and fell beneath the grey tunic, but Garth stood up stiffly and kept a wary tongue. "To be Dey of La Roca would not profit me," he said.

"But to be sailing the seas for England, in a free ship, with a free crew—that would profit you, Admiral!"

She saw his sombre eyes flash as they rested on her. "Be frank with me, Isabel, and according to your frankness I will answer. In bondage a man learns patience and caution.

And since neither man nor woman puts head in lion's mouth for naught, and Marco is neither fool nor weakling, tell me what is in your heart to gain."

Isabel seated herself again on the bed, and with elbows on knees, and the dark oval of her face cushioned in her palms, held his eyes with hers.

"Vengeance and power," said she, lingering on the words. "To have that wild dog Marco cringing before me for his life, and to spurn him with this foot. To humble him to the dust. To torment him, Admiral! To put out his eyes with the hot iron with these woman's hands, as he made me put out the eyes of yonder poor wretch at the well-wheel who dared to love me. To chain him to the rowing-bench of my galley, as I lead my ships to sea. Yes, my ships, I say! For if I have a woman's face and form to move men by desire, I have a strong and subtle brain to execute ambition. Here is a barbarous isle and a barbarous age, yet women fashioned as I am have held sway before, and will hold it again. I will take from Marco his island and his ambition. My name, not his, shall be known through these seas, and my power, not his, shall grow till princes come to sue for me in marriage that shall extend my power yet further. Meanwhile, when I have broken Marco at the oar, and his giant's strength is sapped, I will chain him to my water-wheel as Tarik is chained to-day, and on the day I sail from La Roca to wed some noble prince I will have him flung from the rock as you saw him throw the coward Achmed. That is in my heart, Admiral. Does it please you?"

Held in the spell of the woman's baleful beauty, and impressed despite himself by the confident, passionate torrent of her low-spoken words, Aylwin stood some moments without replying. Those dark eyes, blazing now into his with such unwonted fires, seemed to illumine a vista of imperious, remorseless will such as he had never associated with any woman.

"Madame," he said at last, "it both pleases and displeases me."

"And how, Englishman?"

"That you should take La Roca for your own and lord

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it in these seas pleases me well enough. That you should humble Marco if you can seemeth but justice, though there I have myself a score to collect if God wills. And because of that long score, which must be paid, I will neither have him blinded nor thrown from the rock."

Her blazing face cooled to blank surprise, then her lips curled in a scornful smile. "Oh, faithful hound!" she jeered.

The Ryer shrugged. "O fair and gentle lady, if you will hunt with a hound you must give a hound his meat. My meat is Marco. Marco alive and with his eyes open."

"Why?" she demanded blankly, raising her face from her hands. Before the uncompromising directness of the blue Saxon eyes her lust of vengeance experienced a momentary chill, while his purposeful, towering manhood began to exercise domination over her. "Why?" she repeated.

"Madame, it is simple enough. Yourself heard him tell the trick by which he wed me in my delirium to one I knew not. You heard him avow himself an unfrocked monk. If I am married by an unfrocked monk, it follows that I am not married. But to prove this I must produce my man before the justice of my own country. Therefore I must have Marco."

This time she looked at him so long and strangely that the Admiral flushed uneasily under his tan. With a supple grace, her dark eyes holding his, she rose from the bed and stood bending slightly toward him, her hands clasped lightly behind her, her black hair on a level with his chin, her red lips smiling.

"Can one woman's memory so enslave a man?" she murmured. "Shall a man break chains of iron to enter chains of silk? Is not the world full of women, and are they not all made alike?" A low, musical laugh came from the red lips. "A man like you, Englishman, was built to found a nation and to rule it. You are stark and fearless, simple in speech, terrible in fight. Oh, I have watched you! I have heard the ship captains speak of you to Marco! Marco fears you, for all the savage that he is, as a braggart boy

fears the great dog he holds in leash. His crews of cut-throats would follow you to the death. A few more ships, a cunningly laid plan, and we—you and I, Admiral—may seize Palma from King Jaime and lord it through all the islands. Will you remain a hound in leash, you who are born to rule?"

"I was born to rule a ship, but not a nation, Isabel," said Aylwin, outwardly gentle because inwardly disturbed by those compelling eyes. "And if to love one woman beyond all the world is to be in leash, why, I will stay thus willingly enough. If I might win to England and her who waits for me in Rye I would not change fates with emperors or great kings. You call my speech simple, and so it should be, for my ends are simple. Therefore let us serve each other so far as we may, for I think we shall both go farther as friends than as foes."

Listening to this, the Spanish woman straightened a little, but without changing her attitude or taking her eyes from his, though the smile hardened on her lips.

Said she, "You take a strange road to women's friendship, Admiral, when you tell one whom many have desired that you will not have her as a gift—no, not with a kingdom for a dower. And when she comes, seeking your alliance at her life's risk, you stand there in your stubborn Northern pride and will not so much as share your plans with her!"

"Who says I have plans?" he asked.

"I say so, whose plans are laid to the last detail, waiting only your backing."

"Why, then," said Garth, "if the plans are good, I will back them to my last breath. But when I fight, Isabel, my eyes must see where my blade strikes. May I learn these plans of yours?"

"No more than this: a week from to-day you shall order out the ships, as for an expedition. You will charge your second in command, who is mine already, to gather the fighting crews on the mole before boarding the ships, but yourself will remain with your English in their quarters till you receive word that all is ready. There will be arms

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placed for your English in their quarters over-night—this will be your proof that the plot is ripe. When word reaches you from the mole you will lead your fellows thither with all speed. Marco's men will be ranged there in two ranks. In the one rank every man will have a green band about his sword arm. These are mine. Is this clear, Admiral?" The smile had gone now, and the beautiful face was set and ruthless.

"I see the picture," answered Garth, "but not the artist painting it."

"The artist stands before you, señor. There are very many who hate Marco, and think that with a woman to rule La Roca each may follow his bent. Fools! They have yet to learn their mistress."

"And when I come to the mole with my armed English, how does the play proceed?"

"You will draw them in line across the landward end of the mole, so as to cut off both sides from the town. None will oppose you, for those with my badge will expect you, and the others will be too surprised to act. You will proclaim, so that all may hear: 'Isabel of Valencia is Dey of La Roca! Marco the tyrant is overthrown!' Then you will say, turning to those who wear not my badge, 'Let every man who loves life submit to Isabel the Dey, and cast himself now to the ground, that no harm shall come to him.' Then you will shout 'Isabel!' and draw your sword, and on that signal my green badges will throw themselves on those that have not submitted, and cut them down. As for your English, they will account for any that seek to escape to the town. If there be a fight it will be quickly over. As soon as it is finished you may embark your Englishmen on your own ship and make such dispositions for your journey as you wish. What say you to my plan, Admiral?"

Garth stepped back, staring at the Spanish woman in amaze.

"Are you struck dumb?" she murmured. "Or does your heart fail you?"

"By God, madame!" he exclaimed, with such lack of

caution that she raised an imperious warning finger, "if I am dumb, it is that I ask myself if I am in a mad dream, or speak with a woman of flesh and blood?"

"The proof that Isabel of Valencia is flesh and blood, Admiral, you have but now rejected," she coolly answered. "The proof that my plan is no dream you will experience when you find the arms in your Englishmen's quarters. Remains the question: will you execute the plan?"

Standing there with his great sword still naked in his hard seaman's hands, confronting like an overgrown schoolboy this piece of exquisite guile, and feeling himself the merest pawn in this incredible conspiracy, Garth presently blurted out his thought with characteristic forthrightness:

"Meseems, Isabel, that a design so cunningly laid might well dispense with such poor aid as mine."

"Why, truly, so it might," answered Isabel, beginning slowly to pace the room like some graceful youth. "But I am one who, when I strike, will not risk to have my blow miscarry. You and your English may turn the scale at need. For though you have no subtlety—else with all your brawn you would still be in slavery—you have a stubborn courage. Once I am mistress of La Roca I shall know how to preserve my place, and woe to those who challenge me! Then I shall need you no longer, and, since you will not serve me for love or glory, you may get you gone to your fish-blooded Englishwoman. Now say: will you serve me for your freedom or serve Marco as his slave?"

Captain Aylwin flung his sword back upon the bed, and stood watching the graceful, scornful figure moving to and fro like a caged panther, the slim hands clasped behind her, her eyes aglow with the schemes that revolved behind the delicate arched brows.

"Mark you," said he at last, and paused while she flashed round haughtily. "When I see the arms in my sailors' hands I will serve you for my freedom—and for Marco. Marco I must have."

"Be sure you shall not serve without your pay. I will send you Marco to your ship."

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"How will you take him?"

"What matter how I take him? Enough that I will take him, and alive, and will so deliver him to you. The friends of the Dey Isabel will not all be gathered on the mole. Now are you content?"

"I am content," he answered. "From the moment I see my English with arms in their hands you shall see how they will fight for freedom."

"If I did not think so," answered Isabel coolly, "be very sure I would not promise it. For I am a woman, and for a high price expect a great reward. It will be long before I pick up such another useful gang to labour at my oars. Now lower me again to the rock, for the night grows old, and Marco must find me beside him when he awakes." She gave a low laugh. "Dios! On the day I send him bound into your ship I will spit in his face, and tell him where I spent to-night. Come, now, my scorner of empires, and see you let me down safe, lest you never see your fisher-girl again."

She stepped lightly to the window arch, and Garth, looking out and upward to ensure that the sentinel was not leaning over above them, secured the rope-cradle for her in the stone embrasure of the window, and fixed his leathern jacket again to ease the friction on the running rope. Side by side they stood in the opening.

There, suddenly, her mood changed. "Lift me into the rope," she whispered faintly. "God, how I fear that black gulf of empty air!"

Taking her in his arms, he felt her trembling. It was the first sign she had shown of womanly weakness. For a moment her arms clung to his neck almost with desperation, and, tigress though he knew her, he warmed to her with a man's sympathy.

"Courage, little spitfire!" he muttered. "Hold the line fast and shut your eyes. I am very strong and will not let you fall."

Still her clinging arms held him, and he felt them quivering with her fear as he leaned over to place her in the rope. The faint glow from his hidden lamp showed her black eyes

turned on him in a passion of entreaty to his man's strength. "Courage, little Dey!" he whispered lightly, and as he set her cold hands firmly on the line he bent and kissed her as a man might kiss a frightened child. Next moment he was steadily paying out the rope.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEY ISABEL

THEREAFTER for nearly a week affairs at La Roca followed their normal course. The ships, augmented by the captures from King Jaime, were practised with their altered crews, conditioned, and provisioned, and the Admiral elaborated with his principal officers the plans for a raiding cruise of the entire island fleet along the Murcian coast. The departure was to be made on the seventh day from the midnight visit of Isabel.

While keeping closely his own counsel as to what had passed that night, Garth had exercised himself to discover, from the demeanour of his crews, some sign of impending revolution, but little had come of his watchfulness. Secretive glances, conversations broken off at his approach, the knowledge that his movements were spied upon: all these were nothing new; such conditions had accompanied his command from the first. There was, indeed, so little change to outward seeming that almost he began to distrust any real result from that strange encounter in his tower.

On the sixth day two things happened. The first was in the early morning, when in accordance with his custom he went to the harbour to inspect the progress on the ships and give his orders for the day. As he entered the boat in which he was to make his tour of the ships his second-in-command approached him. Toward this man, whom he had hitherto regarded as a secret spy of Marco, Garth had cultivated an outward show of confidence and the same bluff air of comradeship as he maintained with the rest of his subordinates.

The fellow saluted stiffly. "Admiral," said he, "I am bidden to give you a message from the Dey."

"Then give it, man."

"The message is 'To-morrow.'"

"A short message, and mysterious, Ibrahim. For who knoweth what the morrow may bring forth? Comes it indeed from the Dey?"

The Moor gave him a dark look. "The Dey, whom Allah preserve, said furthermore that the message bore its own explanation to your Excellency."

"The Dey is the Dey," answered Garth, "and the word of the Dey is the law of La Roca."

The second thing happened at noon, when the sentinel on the watch-tower reported a group of four ships far to the northward.

This was important, for if Marco also saw the ships it might involve a last-moment change in the plan of escape or a premature insurrection which would invite disaster. Garth went himself to the tower-top, where he was joined by several of his officers. The ships were very far away, so far that they were mere faint blurs on the horizon, so far that all that could be known of them was that they were under sail, for not otherwise could they be visible at such distance. Therefore, he argued, it was likely they were merchantmen, and a probable easy prey. In that case a swoop of the island fleet under cover of night might secure them, and at one blow complete his tale of ships for Marco. If he claimed the fulfilment of his bargain, would Marco give it and set him free with his men? Marco might declare the ships inadequate, their lading insufficient for his greed. In any case, by capturing them he would not capture Marco, and Marco's self he had sworn to take to Rye.

While he stood silently contemplating the distant specks and considering his course Garth overheard his officers debating among themselves whether or no this should be a cause for postponing the morrow's raiding cruise. A tall Provençal, renegade from the French King's ships at Aigues-Mortes, captured by Marco in one of his earlier raids, and promoted afterward for his savage fighting qualities, was clamorous for an immediate attack on the strangers, and Garth, listening at the battlements to the Frenchman's

fierce insistence, suddenly made up his mind. Here at least was a friend of Marco's.

"Tardec, have out your galley at once," he ordered. "Lay a course eastward for an hour, then steer north-west, so that when you sight these fellows you will seem to have come from Palma. Fly King Jaime's flag. Approach them close, and mark well their strength. Speak them, and discover their destination. Then continue your course northward till you lose them, then return with all speed to La Roca. Observe well, for by your report we will be guided."

"I go," answered Tardec very willingly, "and the devil is in it if we do not eat up the whole bunch of grapes. My galley is swift, Admiral, and my rowers are sturdy rascals, as your honour knows." This he said with a sly grin at his chief, for it was on Tardec's galley that Aylwin had for some time toiled at the oar before his sudden promotion.

By this manœuvre Garth looked to accomplish two things. The absence of so redoubted a fighter should weaken Marco's party when the time came to try conclusions. It would take an hour for Tardec to collect his crew and get away. Then if he followed instructions it would be another four or five hours ere he spoke the strangers, and as long again before he could re-enter the haven. By that time it would be nearing midnight, and Tardec's crew would need a respite ere they could be set to the oars again—for Garth would never engage unless his men were fresh. He reckoned, therefore, to be able to postpone the sailing of the ships until the morning appointed for the revolution. If all befell then as Isabel had promised those four strange ships might go free or be captured as the Spanish Amazon might choose, for he himself, with Marco on his vessel, would be riding the waves for England. If Isabel's plan fell through he would take his own measures for his freedom.

An hour later he stood again on the tower and marked Tardec take his galley to sea. The four ships were still on the horizon, seeming in the light breeze neither nearer nor farther than before. The Provençal held his eastward course till his galley, the smallest of the fleet, was a mere speck on the glittering sea. They saw him change helm and make

toward the ships—invisible as yet to him on account of his lower elevation—and steer north-west till his galley, with no sail to show against the sky, faded in the distance.

Evening came, the Admiral paid his last visit to the ships in the haven, now completely ready for the morrow's cruise. Then, before seeking his quarters, he visited the galley-slaves, and last of all came to the quarters of his Ryers.

Passing the guard at the entrance, who saluted him stolidly, Garth went in alone. His men came round him eagerly, and one of them, taking him by the arm, led him to an inner corner. "Captain," said he, with amazement in his voice, "these were here when they brought us back to-night. In God's name, what means it?"

The rest had followed, and stood in a group about the weapons. Some were their own that had been taken from them when they were captured. Swords, axes, leathern coats. Others had been supplied from the armoury of the pirates. Captain Aylwin examined them and found them good.

"It means, fellow-townsmen," said he, with leaping blood, "that all of us will to-morrow be free men or dead men." Thereupon he gave them the outline of the conspiracy. "I do not trust too much to this Spanish spitfire," said he, "but here is some proof of her good faith. From the moment I lead you forth to-morrow, comrades, we are free men again, and then hey for England and for Rye! It is a better plan than the one we made together, for the pirates themselves fight against each other."

"And while the tigers are snarling John Bulldog will walk off with the bone," laughed a grizzled sailor.

"True, good Robin Short, but let none of you forget that my bone is Marco the Dey. Without Marco neither the *Royal Richard* nor her captain leaves La Roca. Therefore, if there is any of you that fears to stand by me to-morrow through whatever may befall, let him hold up his hand and I will leave him behind when I lead you out in the morning. I would have with me only such as will back me to the end."

"There's no such scurvy craven here, Captain." The prisoners pressed round him, protesting their loyalty with

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harsh laughter and savage oaths. Their swarthy skins were burnt by the suns of their long captivity, their faces gaunt with hardship; they were dirt-begrimed, notwithstanding the improvement he had enforced in their conditions; their clothing was ragged and foul; but the great muscles showed like coiled tree roots on their limbs. Their own folk would scarce have known them, but in the wild faces the touch of sudden hope had kindled a flame of loyalty to their old leader, and Aylwin knew as he looked from one to another that he could rely on every man.

"Sleep well to-night, comrades, and arm yourselves early," he said. "With the dawn you shall see me again, and, once we are together outside, God help those who would hold us!"

He left them with a light heart and new courage. The sight of the good weapons in the prison convinced him as nothing else had done that Isabel's plot was soundly laid and widely shared in. Let him be once at the head of his crew, with arms in their hands, and the devil would indeed be in it if they could not win free of this hornets' nest that was now divided against itself.

Before seeking his bed Garth sent for his second-in-command and bade him have the fighting crews drawn up on the mole at dawn. Ibrahim saluted without comment. "I myself shall fetch the English oarsmen," said Garth. "Let word be brought me at their quarters when all is prepared. Is it understood?"

"It is understood."

Little slept the Admiral that night. Before the first pallor came to the eastern sky he mounted the tower to the sentinel on watch. "Has Tardec returned?" he asked.

"Excellency, there is no sign of him."

"He stays long at sea," commented the Admiral. "He should have been back soon after midnight." But in his heart he was not ill-pleased, for the work of the plotters would be by so much simplified. For a time he watched on the tower, but when the sky began to lighten he descended, armed himself in his fighting gear, and made his way to his Ryers.

The guard admitted him at once. "They have been fed, master, according to your orders," he said. For overnight Garth had bade the guard serve rations an hour before dawn.

"Get you to the mole," he ordered the sentry. "I myself will bring these at the proper time."

The man gave an understanding glance, took his weapons, and departed. Again Garth could not but be amazed at the thoroughness with which the treason against Marco had been prepared.

Before the short dawn had broadened to full day he received his expected summons, and marched down through the narrow cobbled street to the mole, his sea-dogs clanking at his back in joyful pride of their new-found arms. He had given them, ere quitting quarters, the few curt orders necessary for the coming affair.

They came to the mole. There stood the two ranged lines—the smaller line, he noted with satisfaction, on the seaward side. Halting his men across the neck, he advanced as he had been directed. In the longer rank of pirates on his left he saw that every man bore a green band on his sword-arm. Both ranks eyed the line of desperate English with questioning glances, and it was in an utter silence that the Admiral advanced between them, and halted midway.

"Hear me, men of La Roca!" he cried. "I, the Admiral of the ships, proclaim the Lady Isabel of Valencia Dey of La Roca!"

From the left-hand rank came a fierce answering shout: "Isabel!" Garth faced suddenly toward the seaward line, and, turning thither, heard behind him the rattle of loosened weapons. But the men before him stared uncertainly at each other and at their comrades facing them, and yet more uneasily at the armed English closing the mole. A stalwart Moor, bolder than the rest, stepped forth glowering.

"What madness is this?" he roared. "Are we men, and you tell us to serve a woman? Thou treacherous slave, Marco shall flog thy life from thee!"

Aylwin drew no weapon, but "Halt there!" he thundered stormily, holding the man with his eye. "Marco, I tell thee, rules no more. Let every man, therefore, who loves

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Marco a little, but loves life more, cast himself on the ground, and he shall live."

But the Moor gave him no time. There was a stout heart in the fellow. "Hear him!" he shouted fiercely, glaring round him. "Men of La Roca, will you kiss the shoe of a scheming courtesan? Down with this insolent slave who bites the hand that feeds him!" He made a rush at the Englishman, and as Aylwin leapt aside the sweep of the flashing scimitar missed him by an inch, and the Moor reeled with the wasted violence of his blow. Ere he could recover the Admiral leapt at him, felling him with one stunning blow from bare fist. "Isabel," he shouted as he struck, and "Isabel" came in answering storm from the line of rebels as they leaped on their astonished fellows.

In a moment the landing-place was a confusion of fighting men, from whose midst Garth thrust back to where his line of Ryers waited stolidly. "Four of you come with me," he ordered. "The rest get you to the *Royal Richard* while this rabble cut each other's throats. Bring her alongside, and have her ready to sail when I return." With that he led his chosen four up the rock stairway to the citadel.

Unopposed they came to the palace fortress of the Dey, and once within found no lack of signs that the revolt in the palace had been as thorough and ruthless as by the water. Dead men lay about, and the stair to Marco's quarters was slippery with blood. At the narrow doorway to the audience-hall where Garth had been made Admiral guards were posted, whose gear still showed the marks of recent fighting. They offered the Admiral admission, but refused his companions. Garth reined his wrath. The fellows were well armed, their blood yet hot with victory, and the door was too narrow to storm. The pirate in charge of the guard, a bearded Italian whose head was bound with a bloody rag, grinned as he shrugged his shoulders.

"The Dey Isabel is busy, Signor Admiral, as we have all been busy this morning. We have orders to admit you, but none of your cursed English. It is known you did your part, and the new Dey is well pleased with you. But her orders are strict, and I have lost too much blood to-day in

my own interest to wish to lose more for yours. Send your fellows back."

"Where is Marco?"

The brigand laughed cruelly. "Faith, where I would not willingly find myself—in the gentle hands of his mistress, Admiral, awaiting some further mark of her favour. It should be a good play, but my orders keep me here. Will it please you to enter and see the sport?"

There was sinister suggestion in the fellow's manner, and Garth had a sudden qualm. Was the Spanish spitfire about to play him false? He turned to his Ryers and spoke in English.

"Back to the ship, comrades, and if I am not with you in an hour, choose all what you will do. Either sail by yourselves for England, or land every mother's son, cut down any that withstand you, and make yourselves masters of La Roca and all it holds. God give you good fortune!"

"And you, Captain. But yon she-devil has sharp claws. Will you not come back now, and lead us to the sacking?"

"I will not come back without Marco. Wait but one hour, then choose your leader and go your ways."

"We shall not fail you, Captain." They turned and left him. Garth Aylwin entered the hall of the Dey, and as the thick door closed behind him a harsh scream rang in his ears, a man's scream of agony and despair. He ran forward. The scream died away in a sobbing groan, then rose again in a dreadful cry of appeal. "No! Not again! Mercy, for the love of God!"

It was Marco's voice, horrible and changed with pain and fear. Now Garth could see him, bound fast with thongs to one of the pillars of the hall, and in the midst of a close group of his late followers. He whipped out his sword and shouted:

"Back there! Back I say! Where is the Lady Isabel?"

As the pirates fell back he saw her, a figure of poisonous beauty, pitiless black eyes gleaming in her pale face above a gown of green silk spangled all over with gold. She stood beside the slim stone column where the bound victim writhed and groaned. One of his eyes had disappeared under a blistering scar: from the other tears of agony streamed over

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his savage, grizzled features. The vengeful fury's right hand still held the shaft of a light spear, the end of which yet glowed a dull red. Near her stood a brazier of heated charcoal.

At Garth's shout she turned, biting her lip and knitting her white brow. "Halt there, Admiral!" And, seeing him still stride forward, "Seize him!" she ordered angrily.

A dozen of her men ran toward him, but Garth swept a space about him with his naked sword so fiercely that they baulked, looking to their mistress.

Seeing him stayed, she thrust her heated iron scornfully back into the red brazier. "You have done well, Admiral," said she more calmly, "but you are somewhat hasty for your pay."

"Tiger-cat!" cried Garth, reckless. "What is this devilry? I come for Marco, whom you promised me."

Spots of angry colour flamed on the new Dey's pale cheeks. "Marco you shall have when justice has been done," she answered haughtily. "But that is not yet. From to-day Isabel of Valencia rules La Roca, and a kingdom begins wherein brave men may enjoy the fruits of their valour without fearing the jealousy of a savage tyrant. La Roca from to-day is a home for sea-kings, whose fame shall presently be known throughout the seas."

"Aylwin! Captain Garth Aylwin!" The wretched victim, struggling frantically in his bonds, broke in with a wild appeal to Garth in his own tongue. "Save me from this devil, Aylwin! I have wronged you, yet have mercy!"

"I have come for Marco," said Garth stolidly to the woman.

"I have said you shall have him," she answered. "But first, justice. He has blinded and tortured many, and slain many without cause. He forced me with these hands to put out the eyes of one whose only crime was that he was a man and thought me fair. I swore that day that I would cleanse these hands by putting out the eyes of Marco when the time came. And the time has come, Admiral."

"You swore to deliver me Marco, alive and seeing."

"Insolent! Provoke me not too far!" cried Isabel.

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"For your work this day I have paid you with freedom, you and your fellow-slaves. But if you boggle at your pay I can take it back, and put you at the oars again. As for this quivering lump of carrion"—she glanced scornfully at her victim—"he shall be yours when we have finished with him. His punishment is blindness, and I am his executioner. When he made me put out Tarik's eyes, Tarik lost both his eyes together. But a woman should be more merciful than a man. Therefore for two days longer Marco shall look out of his one eye. On the third day his punishment shall be completed, and I will drive him through La Roca, that all may know how useless is a blind Dey and that I will have justice done in my island. Do I speak well, my sea-kings?"

"Isabel!" shouted the ruffians. "Isabel Dey!" Their shout made the chamber ring. Their weapons flashed as they brandished them in frenzy, and Garth stood amazed at the cunning sorcery wherewith a woman had so prevailed on the villains. For the moment, at least, it was manifest they were her willing slaves, and in her smile as she turned again to him was scarcely veiled mockery.

"Master Aylwin," said she, "since you are so soon to leave us, it will be necessary to appoint another to serve as Admiral of La Roca. Will it please you to return now to your ship, until your prisoner is delivered to you, or will you remain our guest in the palace till justice is satisfied?"

"I have told you, madame. Without Marco I will not stir from here."

"Mutinous slave!" yelled one of the bandits. "Lady, let us have no more of this fellow, but take him at his word. Give the order, and we build him into the palace walls!"

"Aye, Isabel Dey!" cried another. "With a peep-hole through which the famishing dog may watch us feast!"

"Would it not be well, mistress of wisdom," said the Moor, "since you have promised the one of these dogs to the other, to enclose both in the same section of wall, that when they begin to hunger the stronger may feed upon the weaker?"

Isabel, who had mounted the dais, looked down with her cold smile upon her supporters, and raised a hand for silence.

The Dey Isabel

"Hear me, Englishman. Marco, that branded dog of mine, raised you from a galley-slave to be leader of his fleet. Till now I have borne with you for the sake of the service you have rendered to La Roca and to me. Because I showed them the way to be rid of Marco these brave men have chosen me to be their ruler, though a woman. But none shall say Isabel of Valencia is a puppet ruler. Therefore, if you love liberty and life, obey, and quickly. Take off your Admiral's belt, lay down your sword, and go to your ship, and when we have done with Marco we will send him to you."

Garth laughed defiantly. "For my Admiral's belt of this robber's den, I value it at less than nothing," cried he, and snapping the jewelled belt with a wrench of his left hand he flung it among the men. "But the sword, madame, is a right good sword, and I have no mind to part with it. If I live, it stays with me. If I am to die, let him take it who can!"

The black eyes of the new Dey flamed at this open challenge. With haughty head thrown back she drew a long breath, while the red spots deepened on her cheeks, and her glance roved over the brigands below.

"Men of La Roca," said her voice, smooth as velvet, perilous as poison, "this rebellious slave also shall learn obedience. By this hour to-morrow he shall be whining for the mercy of a death-blow who now crows so proudly. La Roca needs a new Admiral. Give me that belt."

One of her men picked it up and laid it on the table on the dais.

"This belt," said Isabel, "I will fasten on that man's body who takes this upstart's sword and puts it in my hand."

"Hold there, tiger-cat!" cried Garth loudly. "Be warned in time! When I came hither I left word with my bold English that should I not return within the hour they should come to find me, steel in hand. And come they will, though all the pirates in your island block the way. And when they come they have a long score to square, and so have the galley-slaves on your ships, whom they will bring

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with them. Give me Marco, and I go. Set your jackals on me, and your halls shall run so full of blood that even you will cry surfeit."

"He who brings me the sword," said Isabel, smiling wickedly, "is Admiral of La Roca. But keep the man alive!"

Half a dozen fellows made a rush at Aylwin, who sprang for a pillar to have his back covered, and dealt the first-comer so shrewd a blow on the neck that the blood fountained from the severed artery as the man fell, in falling tripping the second, on whose head the Ryer stamped with berserk fury ere he could rise. With the two bodies making a kind of fence on the paved floor in front of him, and his thirsty steel whirling at the full reach of his long arm, he kept a space about him for a few breathless moments. But the brigand plotters in the hall numbered a score or more, and, however desperate Garth's valour, he must have been beaten down. Isabel, motionless on the dais, watched the conflict with shining eyes and dilated nostrils, like the very tiger-cat Aylwin had named her, savouring the bloody spectacle. But suddenly came an unlooked-for interruption.

The stairway door from the guard-room flung open, and the sentinel Italian rushed in with wild, scared face.

"To arms! To arms!" he shouted. "The town is attacked! The island is invaded! The ships' crews fight for their lives in the street! To arms, comrades!"

The murderous band about Aylwin drew back. Dismay, amazement, were on every face as they stared at the guard. Only the new Dey seemed to keep her head in the emergency.

"Shut the gate, fool!" she ordered sharply, though her fair, cruel face had gone whiter. "Men of La Roca, to the walls! The citadel is strong. This is King Jaime, who seeks revenge by a sudden surprise. But La Roca is not for him. To the walls!"

"Nay, 'tis not King Jaime!" cried the sentinel. "They say it is an English fleet that has landed men along the cliffs. The freed men from the English captives have joined them, and fight like men possessed."

"If it were the devil himself," answered Isabel, "close

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the gate quickly, and man the walls. They cannot storm the citadel, and who holds the citadel holds La Roca!"

The men in the hall rushed to obey. If things were as the panic-stricken sentinel reported, they knew their only hope was to hold the citadel.

Left alone with Isabel and the pinioned Marco, Garth strode to the dethroned Dey, and stood getting his breath, his reddened sword in his hand. For a few moments Isabel watched the pair in a curious fixity, listening in a detached way to the sounds of conflict coming from without.

"It seems I scorned you too readily, Admiral," said she quietly, her dark eyes steady on his. "I plotted well, but you out-plotted me."

"Fate, not I, out-plotted you, madame," he answered. "This business is as strange to me as to you."

"Your men, they say, fight on the enemy's side, and the enemy are your countrymen."

"I know not. But, if so, I think your reign is ended before it is begun," said Garth curtly. "For my countrymen who take to piracy are thorough at the trade."

Isabel listened intently, then said, with a slow shrug of resignation, "They cannot shut the gate." She descended from the dais and came close to Aylwin. "I offered myself to you. Together we could have made power, and this had not befallen. Hark—the palace is forced. I am not minded to be chattel to another savage." She tore open the gold-green silk and exposed the round whiteness of her breast. "Strike now, and strike straight. You did right to keep the sword!"

"Sword of mine never drank a woman's blood, and never shall," he answered. As he spoke a clamour of triumphant battle burst into the guard-room below. "Stand behind me, girl!" he cried urgently. "If I can, I will save you. If not, here is what will do your business." Running to where his two fallen enemies lay in a dark pool on the pavement, he snatched a dagger from one of the corpses and thrust it in her hand.

Then figures leaped through the doorway at the stair-head, and Garth gripped his weapon for what might come.

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Next moment his heart thumped to hear his own name cried and a yell of frantic cheering fill the hall.

"Captain, ahoy! Here he stands, shipmates, carving the bloody pirates. Captain Garth, ahoy!"

The pillared hall echoed again to the cheers. Through the sudden mist that swam in his eyes Garth beheld, as in a fantastic dream, faces he had scarce hoped to see again: faces bearded, tanned, and bloody, men of Rye and Winchelsea ships, men of his own ship from the haven of La Roca, and, in front of all, flinging his dripping sword on the ground, and gripping him madly by both arms, his old second-in-command, Diccon Lightfoot, who had leaped from the galley-side in the fight with the Genoese ship so long ago.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RESCUE

For that moment Marco's audience-hall seemed to rock round Garth, and the stone floor to sway up and down like the sea-floor in a tide-rip. He clutched convulsively at the seaman's hardy form, scanning the remembered face through a smarting blur of tears, while a choking sob tore at his throat.

At sight of his emotion the nearer rescuers gave back a little awkwardly, making a momentary ring of quiet about the pair. Lightfoot held him fast and shook him gently like a man waking his friend. "Cheerily now, Captain! We be all Portsmen here," said he.

"Diccon, Diccon! Man Diccon!" Garth found his voice in a shout. "Do I see flesh and blood?"

"Marry, you see both, Captain mine," grinned Diccon. "Not much flesh, I warrant, for our stores ran out at the last, but blood enough and to spare. It seems Marco's rascals fell out among themselves, but those that welcomed us put up a sweet fight when they shook off the scare of our surprise. You remember the little cove on the north side of the island where we sometimes lay hid with the galleys?"

"Ay, Dick."

"In that cove, Captain, by the grace of God and the poor cunning of your servant Diccon, are lying at this moment four good ships of the Ports—the others we lost on the way. Also lies there a small galley of Marco's that we picked up yesterday as she came to spy on us. What was left of her fighting crew we pitched to the fishes after filling the gaps in her oar benches, and we manned her with

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honest Englishmen. We landed in the cove, and the lads followed me up the cliff and across the town-wall, where we arrived soon after daybreak. I remembered the tender spots, and presently we were inside. No fighting yet—it seems the pirates were busy on the water-front. But with the womenfolk yelling murder from every roof and window, the Dey's men ran up, and then we had a merry party for a time, till suddenly our Royal Richards hove up alongside from God knows where, and Marco's lads found the weather getting too dirty, and crowded all sail for home. We rushed the citadel just as they were slamming the gate in a mortal hurry, and here we are. And guess who waits for you in the Rye ships, Captain!"

"Not Master Farr? Not the Bailiff, Diccon?"

"No, indeed," laughed Diccon gustily. "Not the Bailiff, yet one who has been Bailiff when bailiffs were hard to find. Old Roger sits in his house at Rye, but there sails with us a Farr that would fain be near you, Captain, and that you would fain make near instead of Farr."

"In God's name, man, what mean you?" Garth stood back from his lieutenant and stared, while the blood ebbed from his face.

"Why, then, Captain, in plain words, there sails with us Mistress Rosamund, who got the ships together in the Bailiff's despite, and whipped us over the sea with words of honey and gall, with promises and reproaches, with prayers and imprecations, who took her share of the toils of the journey, who pumped courage into those that flagged, and fury into those that fought, and who would herself have led the attack on the town if I had not bethought me in time to trick her into her room and fasten the door on her as we pulled to land. For that trick you must forgive me, for I swear if so brave a lady had come to harm in the fighting I would never forgive myself."

"Diccon, Diccon, thou true comrade. God send that I may serve thee as well one day!" Captain Aylwin kissed his lieutenant's swarthy cheek, and stood wringing his blood-stained hands. "Now do this one thing for me, Dick. Get a dozen of our own men of the *Royal Richard* and make

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a guard with me to bring this Marco to the ships." He pointed to the prisoner still bound to his pillar. "He is my share of the booty and all I seek. For the rest, let each take what he will from this robbers' den. A full share shall be left for you and Marco's guard, trust me! But let every man bring his plunder to the ships ere night, with all the food he can lay hands on, for we sail at sunset, and the *Royal Richard* with us. Stay, Dick, there is yet one thing more——"

He turned to Isabel. "Madame," said he in Arabic, "these are my countrymen, led to my rescue by that same cold-blooded fisher-girl you know of. We sail to-night, with Marco and his spoils, and I fear our sea-dogs will leave you small comfort in La Roca. But since you are a woman, and Fate has used you harshly, I would not have you harmed. Therefore choose: shall we take you with us to England or send you with a galley to King Jaime's Court at Palma? There are men of his, prisoners in the island ships, who would take you safely and in honour to Mallorca. Be pleased to choose quickly, for my time is short."

White to the lips where she stood beside the bound and writhing form of her late master and victim, Isabel faced the armed throng who now filled the chamber. She moistened her dry lips with her tongue.

"Do I thank you for the mercy of your contempt, señor?" she asked bitterly. "If those cowards had not failed me I would have bricked you in these walls and watched you starve. Do not forget it!"

Garth smiled grimly. "Oh, you would have stung me hard. But your sting is drawn, and I do not fight with women. Choose, for I must go."

"I have chosen," she answered, her arms crossed on her bosom, her head, queenly as ever with its cloudy crown of black hair, thrown haughtily back. "I will go to Palma. And there is one treasure, Admiral, I ask your leave to take with me."

Garth met the scornful gleam of her black eyes, and as man for woman felt a stab of pity for her ruin. "I warn you," said he, frowning, "there is little treasure our sea-dogs will leave here."

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"They will leave the piece that must content me," she answered bitterly. "Even your famished sea-dogs would turn from a blind beggar."

"Madame Isabel, what mean you?"

"Send me to Palma if you will, but give me Tarik."

"Tarik!"

"I grasped at power, and power slipped through my fingers. I trampled on love, but love is a faithful fool. If Tarik would yet have me to serve his blindness, he shall find me obedient. If he would slake his vengeance with my life, my hand shall guide his dagger." A weary note crept into the proud voice.

"Tarik shall come with you if he will, madame. But he shall not be forced."

"If Tarik will not have me," answered Isabel, "I will give myself to those that will, and they are the gulls that feed below the castle rocks. Now go, and may you have joy of your bold fisher-girl, Admiral."

Garth spoke to his men. They cut Marco from the pillar, and led him, bound, through the town he had ruled, through the breach they had made in his walls, and across the island to the cliff-path up which the English rovers had clambered. They rowed to the ships, and Diccon ran along the deck of the largest vessel and shot back the bolt of a cabin in her forecastle. "Speak for me, Captain," said he as he slipped away.

But Garth had forgotten in that moment Diccon and Marco, La Roca and Isabel, the toils of slavery and the taste of conquest. He saw only Rosamund's grey eyes shining welcome in the shadow of the opened door, and with a melting heart he dropped on his knees and carried to his lips the blue hem of her robe. "Ah, Rose of the World!" he murmured, like a prayer.

She bent over him with circling arms. "Garth, I have not come so far, my dear, for you to kiss my clothes!"

So Garth stood up and kissed her lips that had launched a fleet, and held her close; then faced about and pointed to the bloody figure of Marco on the deck between his guards. "Yon rusty bar was all that stood between us, Rose," said

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he grimly. "The hermit Marcus, an unfrocked priest from Robertsbridge, who made himself a robber kinglet on the price he had for parting us. A galley-slave henceforth, by heaven's justice and the vengeance of a woman he abused. His single testimony shall break those bonds the Church could not sever. Sweetheart, we start our wedding journey to St Mary's church at sunset!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SHIP'S RETURN

THE sea-wind blowing round the walls of Rye brought a strange acrid smell of burning on its wings. From the battlements above the estuary the sky to south-west was darkened with a heavy, turbulent cloud which swayed and rolled upon itself, now low overhanging the Rother, now climbing in a long slope, black and brown and white, into the heavens. Streaks of flame shot through the blackness of the canopy resting heavily over the flats where old Winchelsea burned.

Dusk was falling at the close of a sombre, almost sunless day, and Rother rolled leaden under the fading sky, save when at times a sudden quickening of the distant conflagration was reflected redly from its eddying surface.

Roger Farr the Bailiff stood at the seaward-facing window of his chamber and watched the gloomy convolutions of the smoke from old Winchelsea. The bushy hair escaping from his cap was whiter, and the masterful old face was haggard and anxious, and the once stalwart frame sadly fallen away. The tide of affairs for England, and for Rye, and for Master Farr had momentarily changed since with a sinking heart but a stiff lip he had watched his self-willed daughter sail away with the best of the Rye ships to pursue a wild-goose chase in distant seas. Much he doubted that he would ever set eyes on her again, for to-day he was as good as a prisoner in his own house, and his head sat none too surely on his shoulders. Against the occasional ruddy glow that burst from the burning ruins of his neighbour-port he could see from time to time a grim row of small black posts—small at

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this distance, but each, he knew, supporting on its cross-beam the dead bodies of two of the chief Portsmen of Winchelsea.

Weeks ago now the great Earl Simon had sealed his service to the name of freedom on the bloody field of Evesham, going down like a true knight, fighting to the last against hopeless odds after being tricked by the cunning strategy of the terrible Prince Edward. The same terrible Prince who yesterday had descended like a wrathful whirlwind on the doomed, rebellious Port of Winchelsea, and, after hanging many, had ordered the destruction of the whole town. The same Prince Edward to whom Rye had perforce opened her gates, and who now sat feasting with his barons in the Bailiff's own hall, and resolving, for all Master Farr could tell, what fate to mete out to Rye on the morrow.

Among the company of triumphant Royalists sat Adela of Udimore, with an air somewhat aloof, yet thoughtful, though close beside her the young knight of Lewes murmured urgently. Adela's blue eyes watched the Prince. Longshanks, sated with victory, and a little flushed with the Bailiff's wine, was now boisterous, now sombre, one moment laughing loudly with his companions-in-arms, the next frowning gloomily and silent, as though oppressed with horrid memories.

Adela, whose own plotting had helped to gather so many stout fighters for him in the disaffected south, and had herself looked close in the ugly face of war, felt that she could read a little way into the thoughts of that turbulent heart, destined in a day beyond her seeing to animate so great a king. A wave of pure personal loyalty to the Prince moved her, and she glowed with the proud happiness of a devotee at the gracious recollection of his thanks when young Warenne had presented her. Sir William had recalled briefly her services in the enemy's country, the death of her uncle as Simon's prisoner. Masterful, yet gently deferring, Edward had bent before her. "If any poor service of mine," he had said, "can make you some amends for your labours and suffering in my father's cause, be pleased, most dear and lovely lady, to command me at any time

and place." With the words a smile had lit the Prince's face—that face young yet hard, thoughtful yet eager, passionate yet restrained—and the smile had kindled Adela's loyalty to a bright flame.

An impatient exclamation from the young knight at her side drew Adela from her contemplation of the victorious hero. "Your pardon, Will. I was thinking how kingly a king this Edward should become."

"Most true, cruel one. Forgive me if I still exist. The Prince has bewitched you, I think."

"The Prince is the Prince, and we are what we are," answered Adela. "You were saying, William?"

"I say the time is ripe, and over-ripe, Adela. This rebel Ryer, this phantom husband who never was a husband, yet whose cursed shadow the Church holds between us, is doubly dead and doubly damned. If he still lives, his Purgatory is already well advanced, sweating under the whips of his Saracen masters. This fantastic business of a rescue attempted by his knight-errant lady-love is fit only for a minstrel's tale."

"Stranger things have happened in the world than his rescue," said Adela, with a taunting smile of blue eyes. "The lady's own escape from your castle of Lewes was not an everyday affair."

"Peste!" exclaimed Warenne. "Will you never forget that crazy folly of mine? A man is no more than a man, and that wench's beauty might adorn a palace."

"The wench was a very good wench," said Adela coolly, "though I bade you bring her to me with a rope about her neck: a task I think you can never now accomplish. And she sent you to safety, most noble knight, when a word would have handed you over to de Montfort. For that you owe her thanks."

"I bear her no grudge," de Warenne answered, "and, if I did, 'twould be wasted sentiment, for I think by now she is either dead or in some pagan harem. A piece too dainty by half for the accursed infidels!"

"Heartily I wish her a better fate," said Adela. "And since her lover saved her from William de Warenne, I

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think it possible by God's help she may save him from slavery."

"And if so," he rejoined, "she would but preserve him for the gallows rope. So in any case you are as good as free, since Aylwin is doubly dead. Moreover, at a word from the Prince our lord the Pope would certainly dissolve this phantom marriage, and until the fellow's fate is certain 'twere well that word were spoken, Adela."

Just then the hangings parted across the passage which led to the Bailiff's sollar. Old Roger Farr, in a tremble of excitement, the eyes alight in his sunken face, advanced to the head of the low stone stair with a shout which turned every face in his direction.

"Lord Prince! Lord Prince!" he cried, waving a shaking hand, and almost choking on his words.

Edward turned a face grown suddenly thunderous. "What ails thee, old scarecrow?" he demanded harshly out of the silence that had suddenly fallen.

"Ships, lord Prince! Ships! Passing Winchelsea, making for Rye!"

"What ships, dotard? By the Holy Sepulchre! If the French vultures have smelt the burning of Winchelsea we will singe their wings for them! How many ships?"

Half risen from his chair, the eager youth was reaching already for the great sword that hung at its high back. Round the tables the knights leaped up. Amid the sudden commotion of the interrupted meal old Roger could be seen shaking his grey head.

"Not French ships these, lord Prince!" he shouted, with strengthening voice. "As I am Bailiff, these are Rye ships! On their sails sits Our Lady, Star of the Sea, as even my old eyes can make out. And in the van cometh the *Royal Richard*, Captain Aylwin's own vessel!"

Edward hung the belt with his sword on the high back of his chair again and sat down, raising a hand to still the growing clamour. "This Aylwin—methinks I have heard of him, Bailiff. A captain in our Navy of the Ports, is he not?"

"Highness, he was." Old Roger trembled anew at the threatening light in the Prince's eyes.

“ ‘Was,’ sayest thou, dog? Who then presumed to relieve him of his duties?’ ”

“ Most noble Prince, Captain Aylwin fell prisoner into the hands of the unbelievers, and languished many months in slavery. My own daughter——”

“ We are talking, sirrah, of Captain Aylwin. Was he not chief of your Rye captains, who owed to the King my father the duty of keeping these Ports of his, the keys of England, and the ships thereof, furnished for the King’s service? ”

“ Lord, he was the most famous of our sailors. My daughter——”

“ The devil fly away with your daughter, old fox! It comes in my mind that when the King my father sent to command the sailing of his ships of the Ports to the Thames, to support him against that cursed traitor Simon, the ships were not to be found. Your Portsmen sent lying protestations to the King, but no ships. Your neighbours of Winchelsea—rebels and pirates to a man—I have dealt with this day. Think not that Rye is forgotten or forgiven. Now this Captain Aylwin: was he not of those who fought at Lewes against our loyal barons? De Warenne,” cried the Prince suddenly, “ this is your country. Am I not right? This dog Aylwin fought us at Lewes? ”

The knight stood up in his place. “ He did, lord Prince.”

“ And the traitorous villain chooses this very day, when I have wrought some measure of justice on his accomplices, to come sailing home with his defaulting ships! Heard ever man such impudence? By God, we will teach him a lesson! De Warenne, since this is your territory, take a hundred men—two hundred, five hundred, what you will. Get you to the river, and chain me these rebel dogs as they come to land, and bring me this fellow Aylwin straightway. By God’s wounds, I would speak with him before I sleep to-night! ”

The young Warenne rose and did on his sword. But ere he could leave the hall old Roger had shambling down the steps and thrown himself on his knees before the Prince.

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"My lord, hang me if you will, but as men call you just, hear me but one word! Before God, I know not whether Captain Aylwin is with his ship or no. But if he be, I take heaven to witness that it is my daughter has brought him back, him and the ships of Rye that are with him. Just Prince, we Ryers have been caught in the torment of these times with greater men than we. But if we have fought with your Highness's enemies in a mistaken cause, we have also served your Highness's friends. The noble knight of Lewes will bear witness that after the fatal fight at Lewes, when he and other your Highness's friends were fleeing for their lives, it was my daughter who sent Captain Aylwin to carry the noble Earl and his companions safely over the sea, when a word from her or from the Captain would have sent the Earl to his death."

"Is this true, William?"

The knight, buckling on his belt, exchanged a glance with the pale lady at his side. He hesitated. "There is something in what the old man says, lord Prince," he answered.

"True or false," said Edward, "let us have this Aylwin here without delay. And look you, de Warenne, if the girl is aboard, bring her also."

De Warenne clanked down the hall, leaving Adela of Udimore gazing white-faced at the Prince and the kneeling Bailiff.

"Come now, old man," said Edward, somewhat less fiercely, "let us hear more of this daughter of yours who releases noble lords from their enemies and rescues traitors from the unbelievers. Do I smell a romance, Bailiff? Is this Aylwin her lover?"

"Her lover indeed he was, Highness, but by a singular ill-fortune might not wed her."

"Why not, in the fiend's name? Was she under a spell?"

"Lord, he was wed already." The Bailiff's eyes roved uneasily round the tables, and encountered those of the Lady Adela.

"So!" exclaimed Edward. "The infernal villain! Take comfort, old man, we will deal with him."

"My lord," protested Roger vehemently, "they were most faithful lovers. He was wed against his knowledge to a noble lady who deemed him, I have been told, at the very point of death. Yet he recovered, and they two found themselves bound fast in the bonds of Holy Church."

"Bailiff," said the Prince, "either you are mad or you take us all for madmen. Why, in God's name, should the lady wed a dying man?"

"Lord, I have heard it was to release herself from wardship and possess her inheritance, which she could not otherwise accomplish." Again Roger's eyes roved fearfully round till they met Adela's.

The Prince's harsh features relapsed in a smile. "In these evil days it is pleasant to hear a gallant tale of lovers. By my faith, though, that was a crooked jest for the poor lady, to break from one trap to find herself snapped in a worse. Prithee, Bailiff, who was this unhappy dame? Why do you look so strangely?"

"Merciful Prince," answered Roger faintly, "if I mistake not, the lady sits at your table."

"Now, by my father's throne, this is the maddest tale ever man heard!" cried Edward. "Fair and gentle ladies, which of you is bound in troubled wedlock to this traitor seaman?"

"Prince, I am she." Scarlet under the gaze of all, the Lady Adela stood fearlessly erect, the flashing blue eyes unflinching before Edward's stare of amazement.

"You!" he exclaimed. Then, again more gently: "You, sweet madame, whose hands held up the flower of loyalty amid the foul weeds of treason? Adela, it is beyond belief!"

"Lord, the old man speaks truth."

"You a rebel's wife? Not St Michael and all his shining host could have persuaded me. Forgive us, madame, we had thought our good William of Lewes so happy as to have won some favour from you."

"Lord Prince, I am a wife yet no wife. I was ward to the Abbot of Robertsbridge when Sir William sought me in marriage, and the Abbot, being at feud with the Earl, and

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unwilling to see so rich an estate pass from his hands, profited by the disturbances of the time to prevent the marriage, falsely giving out that I was in his gift. I came of age, and by my father's testament was bound either to wed within the year some man of noble rank or lose my inheritance and take the veil. At that time Lord William of Warrenne was with the King your father. I escaped to London to await him there, and wed him in the Abbot's despite. It befell that on the journey I took shelter in a hermit's cell, where this Captain Aylwin lay, as was thought, at the point of death. He raved of his lady, and when I approached he called me by her name. And suddenly the devil tempted me, and I thought: it may be long ere that knight and I can meet. It may even chance that he falls in battle for the King. But here is a man, of noble condition, who to-morrow will be carrion. Let me wed him to-night before a priest and the proper witnesses, and I shall be free of the Abbot and can claim my inheritance, and then, this Aylwin being dead, I can wed de Warrenne without let or hindrance. So with a bribe I prevailed on the hermit to wed us that same night, and I took the man in my own litter to London."

"And the fellow recovered?"

"Highness, my deception was punished. He recovered. But husband and wife we have never been."

"Nor ever shall be, by the Mass!" cried Edward. "Fair and sweet lady, a husband who dies by the rope is as dead as one that dies of a fever. Be assured this night shall see you free, and England the cleaner for another base rebel hanged!"

But now the proud Lady Adela clutched her breast and swayed unsteadily, her face as pale as it had been rosy.

"Highness," she faltered, "this Captain is a very valiant man. God forbid I should seek his death!"

"Sweet madame, the villain's death shall set you free. Justice demands it. God in His goodness ordains it. And I, the humble servant of God, and my father's loyal son, am appointed to execute that righteous judgment. Madame, we drink to your happy deliverance from so strange and

cruel a bondage. My lords and ladies, join me in this health!" The Prince raised his wine-cup, and a shout of acclamation went up through the hall. But Adela of Udimore collapsed in her seat with horror staring in her blue eyes, and Roger Farr gazed about him with the blankness of despair.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KEEPER OF THE KEYS

THE Prince's eye, as he resumed his seat, took in the Bailiff's crouching figure.

"Still here, old fox?" he exclaimed. "Would you stay to see the hanging of your friend? For shame! Get you to your kennel!"

But at the young victor's jeering command Roger straightened suddenly with the courage of desperation, and something of his old-time dignity clothed him.

"Lord, hear me speak one word. Men call you a just Prince, though a terrible. When the Rye ships came not to aid the King your father, it was I, the Bailiff of Rye, who bade them stay. If any failed in loyalty, it was I, the Bailiff, on whose shoulders lay the blame. Not on Captain Aylwin, who fulfilled his orders, but on me who gave them, the punishment should fall."

"God knoweth it is like enough to do so, Bailiff," answered Edward sternly. "Yet I think you did not fight at Lewes against us."

"True, lord. Yet neither did I save the noble Earl of Warenne. I have heard that but for the aid which the Earl brought from France the war on the Welsh Marches had not ended as it did. If my lord of Warenne was timely with his aid, it was through my daughter and Captain Aylwin that he was spared to render it. I am an old man, lord Prince. Many years I have served King Henry in his Port of Rye, and if I die now the King hath little loss. But this Captain is a strong man in his prime, who hath done your Highness, in the sum, more good than ill: a man cunning in the warfare of the sea, a strong defender against your

Highness's enemies abroad, a stark and fearless fighter, who under favour of your Highness's pardon might serve your realm usefully for many years. For him, and for my daughter who has done no wrong, I plead: let your valour show mercy to the one and justice to the other."

"You plead boldly, Bailiff, and set the noose daintily about your own neck. But tell me this: how is it, you being Bailiff, the credit of saving my lord de Warenne should be set down to another?"

"Sir, I was sick, well-nigh to death. My daughter administered the Port in my place."

"This daughter of yours must be a very Amazon, old man. And though by your own confession you are a damnable traitor, yet I find a spark of courage in you. This therefore I promise: you shall stay here if you will, and if this daughter you prate of is with the ships you shall see her before you hang. Now get thee out of my sight. Ha! Who comes?"

The Prince looked up. There came a clank of arms without. The curtains over the doorway were thrown back, and into the hall strode young Warenne, with a score of men-at-arms. In their midst walked Garth Aylwin, shackled, with Rosamund at his side.

"Bring hither your catch, William. Man, you lose no time!" cried Edward. "Stand back, Bailiff, on your life."

Garth and Rosamund were led forward. They made obeisance to the King's son, and thereafter Rosamund's eyes sought her father's, while Garth faced his judge.

Silent and stern, Edward considered them both. The tall sea-rover, rough-bearded from his voyage, wore the faded uniform of his captaincy, which he had donned, all ignorant of the state of affairs in England, for the bringing of his ship into the Port she had left so long.

More lingeringly the King's son considered Rosamund, pale despite the colour that sun and sea had put upon her face: no Amazon such as he had looked to behold, but ripe with a woman's beauty, and ennobled with a gentle dignity in face of threatening disaster. Her deep grey eyes seemed to hold something of the mystery of the sea from which she had come as she smiled a brave smile for the encouragement

of that old man, her father, who had so eagerly returned her gaze from the side of the hall where he had been thrust. The girl's hands were bound behind her, and the blue gown she wore showed stained and travel-worn, but she bore herself as fearlessly as in the days when she had queened it in Rye. The Prince's face lost a little of its sternness as he observed her.

"Loose the girl's hands," he ordered, and waited while it was done. Then with hawk-like swiftness he turned to the other prisoner. "Thy name, sirrah!"

"Garth Aylwin, lord. A captain in the King's Navy of the Ports."

"You fought at Lewes with Earl Simon?"

"I did," replied the mariner, his head held high.

"Why?" The word shot out like a sword-thrust.

More reasons there were than one, but Garth blurted out the chief: "Lord Prince, my enemy fought with the King."

"What enemy, sirrah?"

"The same that brings me now before your Highness."

"How should the Earl Warenne's son be enemy to a captain of the Ports?"

For a moment the prisoner's eyes turned from the Prince and flashed wrathfully on Warenne. "Lord Edward," he answered, "men say you are wed to a fair and gracious lady whom all honour. Will it please you ask the Earl's son, and, if he answer truly, your Highness as a faithful knight will know."

"William," said the Prince, "this fellow lays his damnable treason to thy charge. Read me the riddle."

The haughty young noble hesitated, coloured in confusion, then raised his head defiantly. "I took this Bailiff's daughter to my father's castle, with other hostages for the loyalty of Rye."

"Thou smooth-tongued villain!" burst out Garth. "Lord Prince, it was not as a hostage, but a paramour, he would have had her in his hold! Sir, yourself is witness that he had her beside him at the feast that was made for the King your father before the battle, in the Priory Hall at Lewes. But by God's grace I took her from him unsoiled.

After Lewes fight he fled to Rye, where I would have slain him in this very house but that Mistress Farr herself laid it on me to deliver him safe to France, on condition that he, with the Earl his father who was with him, gave me a letter to our lord the Pope, to forward my prayer for an annulment of my marriage with the Lady Adela of Udimore."

"Something of this I have heard," said Edward. "Did you give him such a letter, William?"

"Highness, I did. That my father and I might live to serve the King."

Edward's glance sought Rosamund again.

"Mistress," said he in friendlier tones than hitherto, "it seems you have a good talent for diplomacy, as well as a signal quality of daring. Were I in my father's place I think I would sooner have you for friend than foe."

Rosamund's grey eyes considered in their turn the harsh yet noble features. A faint flush tinted her cheek, and the dawn of a smile lit her glance. "Highness, when you are in your father's place——" she began, and then stopped short.

"What then, mistress?" the Prince demanded, not ill-pleased, it seemed, at her confusion.

"When that time cometh, lord, it is in my mind you could make all the realm of England your friend."

Edward flushed swiftly. "Now by the Mass, girl, that is kindly said. Though how my lord the King might take it I know not. As for me, I make no war on women, especially on one so fair as thou, that hast kept for the King so trusty a baron as the Earl Warenne."

"Lord, I acted for my father, in his name."

"Peste!" exclaimed the Prince. "If I am to credit you with the virtue of your acts, and your father with the merit of their intention, whom, in God's name, am I to hang for the disloyalty of Rye? Remains this rebel Captain. Methinks you have wasted your pains, mistress, to snatch such an one from the pirates, that he should die a traitor's death at home."

"Yet consider, noble Prince," urged Rosamund, "it was he that carried your Highness's friends to safety when no other was at hand to do so."

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Edward raised a hand to arrest her plea. "Your arithmetic fails you, mistress. His service has been paid by that letter to the Holy Father, wrung from de Warenne as the price of purchase. There remains the Captain's treason, against which nothing counts for his redemption."

"Fair Prince, there is the greatness of mercy!" exclaimed the girl, sinking on her knees and stretching out hands of entreaty.

"There is that truly," answered Edward, his eyes, grown stern again, bent thoughtfully upon the kneeling figure. "Yet the greatness of mercy, extended to armed rebellion, may be the greatness of folly. I am here to work the King's justice upon traitors."

From where he stood beside his prisoners young Warenne took a step forward. "Lord Prince, give me leave to speak one word! God knoweth this man and I have no love for each other. Yet I pledged my knighthood, when he took us from de Montfort's vengeance, that should the day come for him to answer for his treason I would plead on his behalf the service he then did for our lord the King."

Edward eyed him coldly. "The plea hath been already advanced, William, and by a better advocate than thou. Moreover, were it granted, I think thou wouldst be the sorriest knight alive, for, look you, this letter of yours never reached the Holy Father, and therefore Captain Aylwin's marriage stands—till he is hanged. Therefore take him out, William, and hang him from the yardarm of his ship, for a warning to all the other captains in our Navy of these Ports."

For a moment a dead silence fell upon the entire company in the hall. Garth, ignoring all the rest, his hands clenched in his shackles, gazed with his soul in his eyes at the figure of Rosamund staggering blindly to her feet. Then de Warenne's men-at-arms stepped clanking to him. Already their rough hands were on him, and Rosamund, ashen pale, her eyes big in her white face, was clinging wildly to him in the guards' despite. A woman's scream—not Rosamund's—rang through the hall.

"Stay, Prince, in the name of God! There is yet a plea! William, hold off thy butchers! Lord Edward, hear me!"

Adela of Udimore, careless of all beholders, ran from her place and flung herself on her knees before the King's son.

Edward started back, sternly surprised, yet courteous at sight of her. "Fair madame, what is this? 'There is a plea,' say you? What plea can Adela of Udimore present for the life of a traitor?"

"This, lord: the honour of Edward Plantagenet!" Her cry rang like a challenge through the hall, and every eye was on her.

"Lady, be pleased to enlighten me. I had thought justice to the King and freedom for Adela of Udimore were here happily met."

"Most noble Prince, you have said I did you good service. You swore to me for the sake of that service to grant whatever favour I might ask. Prince, I ask the pardon of this man—my husband!"

"Sweet madame, are you mad? Justice points the way of freedom, and you would have me shut the gate and bind you for ever to a traitor."

"Lord, the man is noble. Traitors have been pardoned ere now, and have lived to serve the King with honour. Mad I may be, and bound I may be for life, but I beseech your Highness, by your plighted word, grant me my husband's life!"

Edward had risen, and stood frowning and deeply flushed.

Suddenly Garth cried out harshly, in the grip of the men-at-arms, "Adela, I am not your husband!"

Edward turned fiercely on him. "The worse for you, fellow!" Then more gently he addressed the kneeling woman. "Fair and loyal friend, this marriage tangle is beyond a poor knight's wit. You hear the man. Whether he be your husband or no, God knoweth. But if he be not, your delicacy need not fear."

"He is my husband!" cried Adela. "Would God he were not! His ring is on this hand. The priest gave me the writing, and the witnesses are living."

"I am not your husband," Garth repeated. "Since I am to die as a traitor, take that comfort. The evidence that I am not your husband I brought with me in my ship. The

false priest who wed us was an unfrocked monk from Roberts-bridge. The same turned pirate, and held me captive till my Ryers rose against him, and, aided by the ships brought by Mistress Farr, we burned his brigand hold, and haled him back to testify to my freedom and yours."

Wide-eyed, Adela listened, then turned again to Edward. "Husband or no husband, lord, I claim this life under thy knightly word."

The Prince sat down heavily, and there was a tense silence. At length he spoke calmly, looking down upon the fair petitioner.

"Pray you rise, madame. Plighted word calls for no bent knees. William, free your prisoner."

The grip on Garth's arms relaxed. His shackles were struck off. Dizzied a little at the sudden change from death to life, he stood dumbly, Rosamund's hand on his. Edward watched him shrewdly.

"You seamen are unmannerly folk," said he. "Have you no thanks?"

Garth started at the rebuke, then went a little unsteadily to Adela, and dropped on his knee. "Most noble lady, who humbled yourself to beg this life of mine, I swear as God lives there is no bond between us save my heart's full thanks."

"Why, this is better," said the Prince. "Perchance you will thank me also, Captain."

Aylwin stood up. "Lord Prince, I owe thee no thanks," said he, while the assembly gasped at the answer.

"Thou graceless dog!" The King's son flashed into sudden wrath. "Presume not too far on my clemency! A pardon given may be as easily withdrawn."

"Aye, Lord Edward, by little men. But not by such as thou. I live because this lady asked for it, and a great Prince pledged his word. Why should I thank your Highness, who spares me because he must, and to-morrow may hang my kinsmen and my friends?"

"That indeed I may, Captain." The Prince considered him. But the angry flush died from his face, leaving it grim, yet earnest. "Methinks I perceive in you clear thinking with bold speech. Others have called you valiant. Captain

Aylwin, this war-worn land has need of such men. You have fought stoutly for my enemies. Say now: would nothing make you my friend?"

At those unlooked-for words Garth stared at first quite blankly. Then slowly a new light dawned in the blue Saxon eyes, and when he found his voice a new note of reverence spoke in it.

"Lord Edward, methinks your Highness's trust would make a friend to your Highness of every man in Rye and the Ports."

"How mean you?"

A something almost wistful in the royal question fanned the new spark of loyalty in the rover's heart, and the rude Saxon words came in an unwonted flood.

"Prince, we have not known you. We have fought for our liberties, believing them in jeopardy. We freemen and barons of your Ports have been charged these many years to hold the keys of England, and have held them fast. The King's enemies from oversea have harried us, and we have harried them. We have kept the bolts on England's gates, though often our brethren's blood has washed the threshold. The King your father forgot our ancient rights, or so it seemed to us, but our lord the King is far away, and we have not known him. It may be we have erred. The cause we judged just is fallen, and you come among us with victory in your hands, to show mercy or work vengeance as pleaseth you. Set our barons' heads upon our gates if you will. There is none to withstand your Highness. Yet remember: our Brotherhood of the Ports is a goodly company, and bold, and if it is cut off strangers will not easily hold the keys that we have held. Our lord the King is old, and by God's grace you will one day reign in England. Give command now to our freemen: hold fast the keys ye have held; and we will guard them to the death for a Prince whose valour is lit by wisdom and whose justice is touched with mercy."

Edward sat very still, his keen young eyes seeming to search the speaker's heart. "Art a strange fellow, Captain," said he at last. "I did not think a Saxon head could think such thoughts or a Saxon tongue give them utterance. Say,

if I pardon the rest of your Portsmen, will you take oath of fealty, and serve the King and me in love and loyalty as Bailiff of this our Port of Rye?"

"Oath of fealty will I take, and gladly serve your Highness, but the Bailiff of Rye must be chosen by the Ryers themselves."

The Prince smiled grimly. "Methinks they would not boggle at it, Aylwin. But we will not bind them against their privileges. You shall be my liege-man from to-night, and the Portsmen shall be pardoned. And since I have made of Winchelsea an example I will build one day, God willing, a greater Winchelsea yonder on the hill that faces Rye, and between you you shall hold Rother against every foreign foeman. Are you content?"

"I am content to serve the noblest prince in Christendom," answered Aylwin, and dropped on his knee.

"Why, then, since it seems we are to be friends, and both have lived among the infidels, you shall eat my salt, and seal the friendship quickly. Seat you at my tables. You also, mistress, who led your sea-dogs to his rescue. And you too, old man," said the Prince to Roger Farr, who stood trembling at the sudden reverse of fortune. "One thing remains. William, send your fellows back to Captain Aylwin's ship. Free his Portsmen, and bring hither that forsworn monk, that we may know for certain that nothing stands between yourself and the noble lady of Udimore save the broken deception of a villain."

The men-at-arms went out, and presently returned, with Marco in their midst. Haggard and trembling, the half-blind giant was led before the Prince.

"Stand forth, you two," commanded Edward, and Garth and Adela left their places and stood beside the brigand.

"Thou renegade dog," said the Prince, "look well upon these two, and as thou lovest thy filthy life answer truly: didst thou wed them with the rites of the Church?"

"Lord, I did. Have mercy!"

"And when this was done wast thou priest of God or no?"

"If I answer truly, shall I live, my lord?"

The Keys of England

“Wilt thou chaffer with me, scum? Answer, or I have thee staked down for the rising tide to choke the truth from thy foul jaws!”

“Merciful Prince, I was excommunicate from the Abbey of Robertsbridge.”

“You hear, William? Fair madame, your bonds are broken. To-morrow we will send for the Abbot, and when he hath confirmed the words of this damnable rogue he shall wed two pairs of lovers in the church at Rye, and shall take back to his Abbey this one-eyed miscreant, to deal with him as Holy Church directs. Knights and fair ladies, drink now with me to these happy nuptials.”

Thus did Captain Garth Aylwin become a Bailiff of Rye and a keeper of the keys of England.



